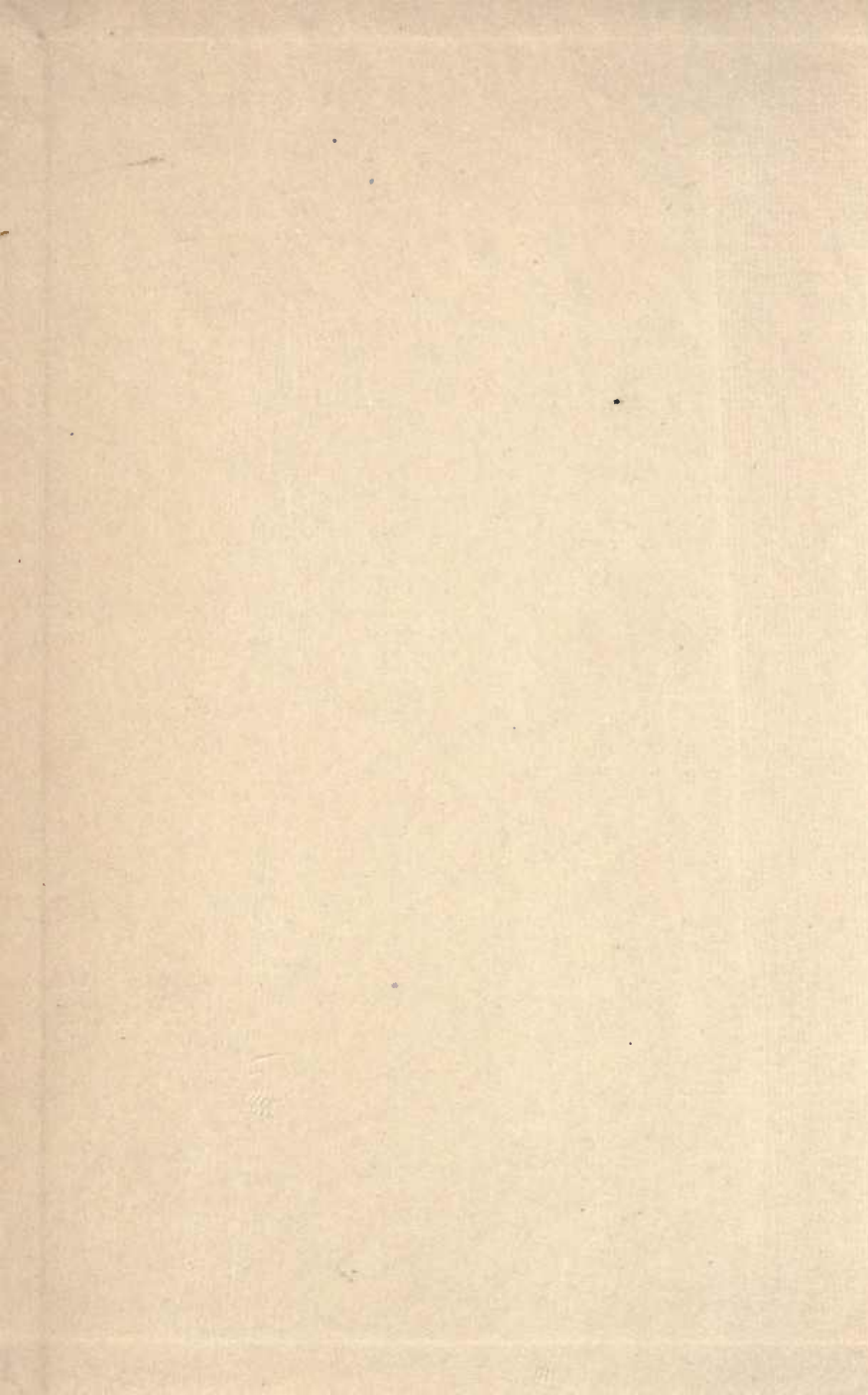
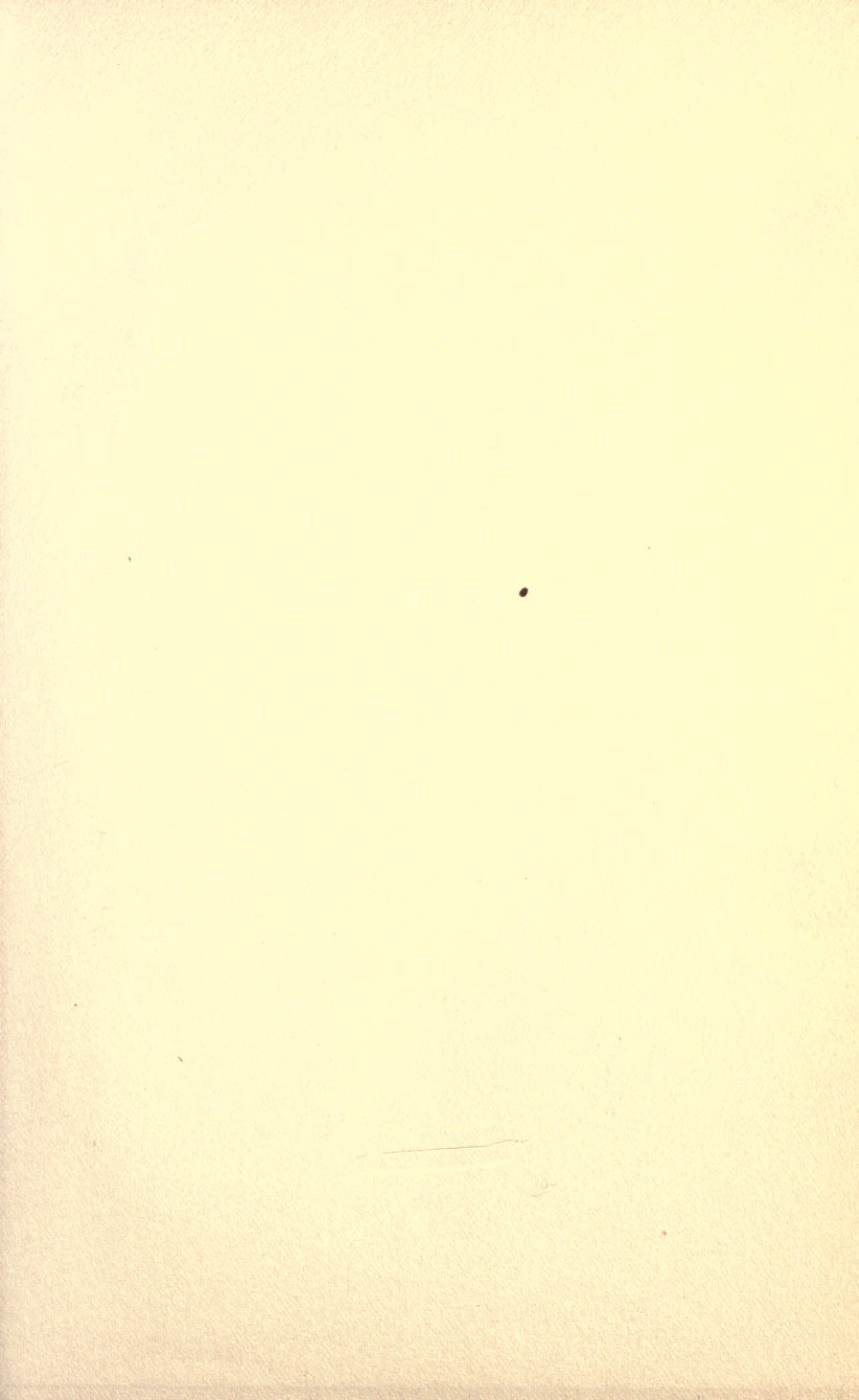


THE TYRANT

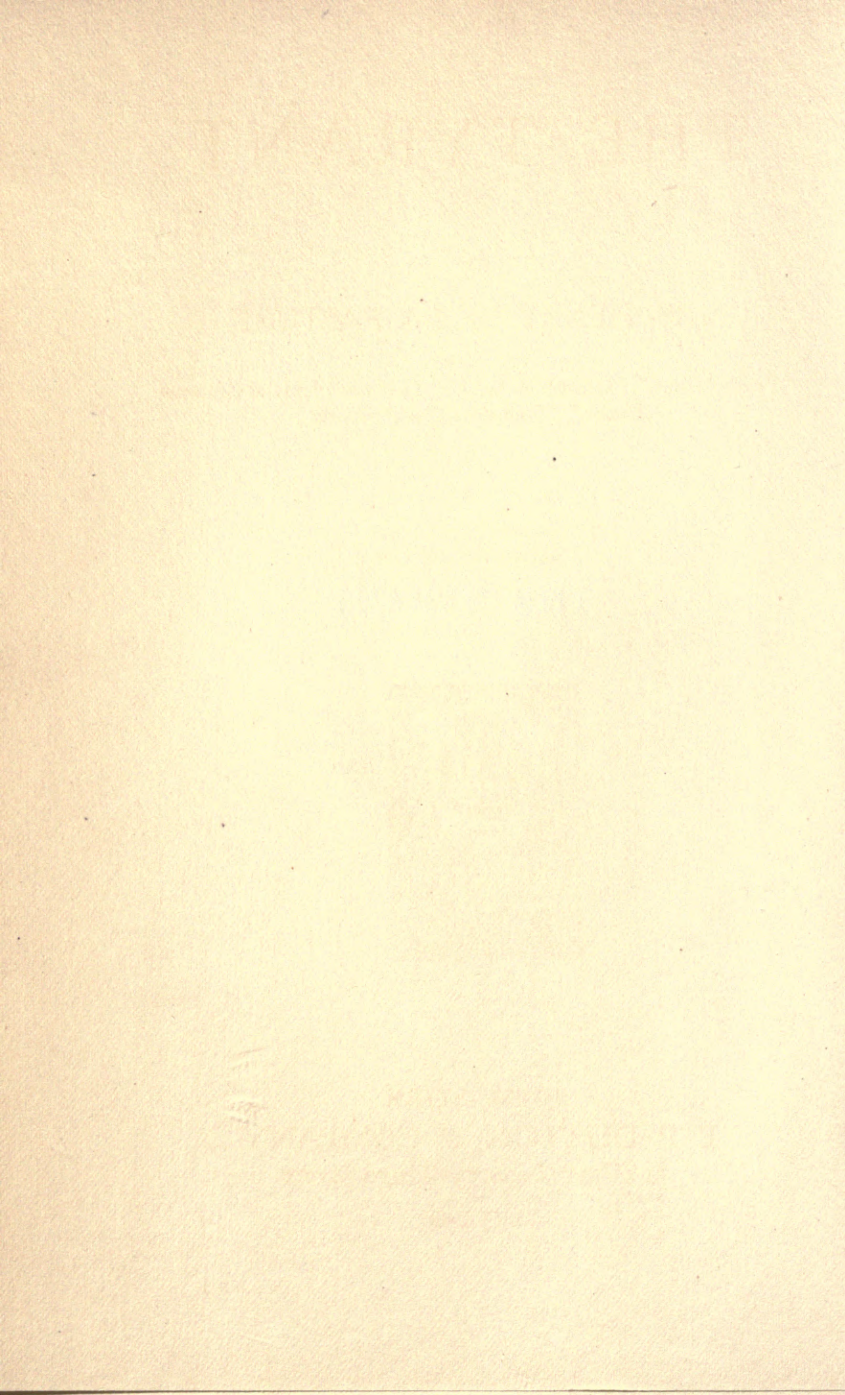
By
Mrs. Henry
de la
Pasture



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THE TYRANT



THE TYRANT

BY

MRS. HENRY DE LA PASTURE

Author of

"Peter's Mother," "Deborah of Tod's," "The Lonely Lady of Grosvenor Square," "Catherine's Child," etc., etc.

*O Richard, ô mon roi,
L'univers t'abandonne!*



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THE TYRANT

THE TYRANT

CHAPTER I

ANNETTE UNDER THE CEDAR

THE village of Llanon, though containing scarcely a hundred inhabitants, formed a little world complete in itself.

It lay cradled among the hills of the Welsh borderland; the situation was sheltered and the water supply all that could be desired; sometimes more than could be desired, for in autumn and winter the clouds often floated below the level of the hill-tops, and shrouded the dripping woods that clothed the hill-sides; the rain was incessant, and the mountain streams swelled into torrents, while the mountain lanes became merely channels which served to convey the overflowing waters to the river in the valley below.

But Llanon lay facing the south, so that it received also a full share of the sunshine which blesses the mild climate of the west; and if the rainfall were excessive, yet it increased the fertility of the soil and promoted the rapid growth of timber. The inhabitants were seldom heard to complain of it.

The village was old and picturesque. Time seemed to have passed it by. It looked down disdainfully upon the railways and the traffic of the lower levels.

Automobiles occasionally surprised it by climbing the hills, but the narrow winding rocky roads were not tempting to drivers, and there was little of interest to be seen in Llanon by the undiscerning tourist, though much to be observed by the antiquarian.

The guide books mentioned the old church of St. Nevyn and the wishing well of St. Gwynnws, where the mutilated and time-worn image of the saint still occupied her niche beneath a stone archway above a bubbling spring, but the latter was private property, standing within the grounds of Nantgwilt Manor, where had dwelt for many successive generations the ancient family of Kemys. The guide books also pointed out a cromlech just outside the village; and upon an eminence in the Nantgwilt woods a large British encampment; but the inhabitants thought more of the lilies of the valley which grew over these remains of antiquity, and which were to be gathered in thousands when anyone chose to go a-Maying there,—than of what lay beneath them.

The great churchyard formed a level plateau, and the little village, built on two sides of the square,—a humble collection of uneven stone-tiled roofs and sloping gardens,—looked the more insignificant because the square embattled church tower dating from the 14th century was so imposing.

The main street consisted of a single row of cottages and almshouses facing the churchyard wall, and ending in the circular sweep before the Manor House, which opened directly upon the road.

At right angles to the almshouses stood a line of shops, and the Kemys Arms; with a wedged in residence of gentility known as the Red House.

The shops consisted of three general utility or grocery stores, including the post-office. All three stocked exactly the same class of goods, and displayed the same medley of cheap sweets, balls of twine, coloured advertisements, fly-blown raisins, and boxes of starch in their small dim windows. The three shop keepers, ignoring the possibilities of competition, serenely borrowed from each other when demand exceeded supply; or bade their customers wait until fresh goods were due to arrive in the usual course of events.

Next the post-office came a smithy and a wheelwright's, and there the business houses of Llanon ended; for the baker lived in an adjacent village, and called twice a week upon the few inhabitants who did not bake their own bread, and the butcher sent meat on Fridays from the town of Llysdimam nearly seven miles distant. No one dreamt of buying fruit, other than oranges and lemons, since fruit in its season was plentiful in Llanon, and the apple supply lasted from July to April.

The Rectory hid itself modestly behind the almshouses, and its windows overlooked a portion of the

gardens of Nantgwilt, although a narrow lane divided the respective properties of squire and parson.

The Manor House turned its dark front upon the churchyard; and the home-farm with its great barn and low outbuildings, stretched across the far side of the square, and met the walled-in domain where dwelt old Mrs. Kemys, the mother of the present lord of the manor. In this thatched ornamental cottage she spent her days in great comfort and seclusion, retired from the cares and worries which had beset her during her reign over the great house; yet able to keep an attentive watch upon the doings of her successor.

Old Mrs. Kemys was liked but feared, in the village, whereas young Mrs. Kemys, though liked even better, was certainly not feared; and the respect she inspired was mingled with the pity which to vulgar minds is akin to contempt.

"Can't call her soul her own, poor thing," said Mrs. Prickard, of the post-office.

"Well, she brought nothing into the family; the poor old colonel, her pa, had nought but his pension what died with him. What can you expect? It's all the squire's, and he lets her know it. I don't blame him," said Job Evanson, who was an independent thatcher living at Llanon, but in great request all over the neighbourhood, where his art, as he said himself, was dying out.

"Ah, like sides with like. You're a bit inclined to be masterful yourself, Mr. Evanson," said Mrs. Beddoe, a mild widow who took in washing, and lived next door to the thatcher and his wife. Mrs. Evanson was not one of those, she often remarked, who were fond of making mysteries, and consequently all her affairs were intimately known to her neighbours.

"I know I'm masterful. I always was a bit inclined that way," said Mr. Evanson, with satisfaction. "My opinion is that a man as *is* a man should let people know it. Then he don't get imposed upon, not by his wife nor by nobody else."

"I don't hold with extremes," said Mrs. Beddoe. "My pore husband used to say 'Live and let live,' and we never had a word that I can remember. I wish I'd ever come across another like him, and I'd 'a got married again."

"While there's life, there's hope, mum," said Mr. Evanson, winking at Mrs. Prickard.

"No, I've left it too late," said Mrs. Beddoe, thoughtfully. "That's what comes of living in Llanon, year in, year out. The choice is so limited. Never anyone new coming along."

"Ah well," said Mrs. Prickard, "we're never tired of abusing Llanon, but all I can say is, I never go down to Llysdinam but what I'm thankful to come up home again, for all one hears of the gaities of town life. What else was you asking for, Mrs. Beddoe?"

Reckitt's blue? I know I have a boxful somewheres. There, I dumped down the new parcel of picture postcards on the top — and missed it."

Two little boys came into the shop. Flaxen-haired, blue-eyed, in sailor jerseys, darned and re-darned, and serge knickerbockers grown too tight and displaying legs golden with sunburn.

The elder and broader was sturdy and healthy, with a dimple set at the corner of a wide humorous mouth; the younger was shy and delicate.

"Master Corney, I declare," said Mrs. Prickard, in a kind voice. "Now what do you be wanting this morning, sir, out so early? And Master Manuel."

They wanted a pennyworth of bulls-eyes, and having executed their commission, made themselves as scarce as possible; looking first to the right and then to the left, as though fearful of being caught, and then racing down the road towards the Manor House.

"I'd be ashamed to let *my* boys go about so shabby," said Mrs. Prickard, looking after them compassionately. "Did you see their socks, Mrs. Beddoo?"

"I've seen them often enough," said Mrs. Beddoo. "Falls to pieces in the wash they do. So does all their things. Sometimes I don't know how to face Mrs. Sharman up to the Manor House, when I take the washing home."

"Ah, poor thing, she must feel the pinch of

poverty, having seen better days when she was house-keeper to the old man."

"Better days! 'Tis my belief Squire Kemys has more money than he knows what to do with. And I've got good authority for saying so," said Mr. Evanson, striking the counter. "If he don't choose to lay it out on the backs of little boys, I don't blame him, as I said before."

"If that be so, and I've heard it said till I'm bound to believe there's something in it — why he's no better than a skinflint miser with the state all them cottages out to the Glyn be in," said Mrs. Prickard, contemptuously, "and I'm sorry for madam. She's had a hard time, poor thing, and everyone knows it."

"A pretty girl she was in the old days, time she lived in the Red House, with her pa,—but her spirit's broke," said Job Evanson. "I don't know what the old colonel would say if he could see her now. He was another sort to Squire Kemys, and I shan't never forget him for one."

They were all silent, for everyone present remembered the old days of which the thatcher spoke; and everyone present had kindly memories of the gentle old soldier who had once been a familiar figure in the village street, walking erect and cheerful, with his pretty daughter clinging to his arm.

Colonel Myllon had been laid to rest beside his wife in the square churchyard twenty years ago, but the very sound of his name had a softening effect

upon those inhabitants of Llanon whom he had counted among his friends.

"I'll bid you good morning, Mrs. Prickard; 'tis time I got back home again," said Mrs. Beddoe, in subdued tones; and with her departure the conversation flagged.

Stone-tiled and ivy-clad the front of the Manor House presented a sombre and melancholy aspect. The entrance faced the village street, and the windows of the left wing, heavily overshadowed by trees, looked across a narrow lane into the Rectory kitchen garden: and on the right, upon the ancient tombstones and aged yews of the churchyard.

The brightness of the other side of the house therefore took strangers by surprise.

Here the long low rooms, panelled with oak, and rich with curiously wrought cornices and ceilings, looked out upon a gay and charming garden, where bright flower beds and old lawns gave place to finely timbered meadow lands, bounded in their turn by woods, which sloped downwards into the very heart of the valley.

A grove of ilex sheltered the lawn on the west, and a path through this grove, so deeply shaded as to be almost a tunnel, led to the kitchen garden.

The wide lawn before the house was cut into old-fashioned shapes of diamonds and hearts and circles, now glowing with wall-flowers of every hue, from deep red velvet to palest gold.

Crimson faced daisies edged the borders, and the periwinkles, opening their eyes upon the spring world, peeped over a rockery like little mirrors reflecting the hue of the cloudless April sky.

The breath of the east wind was hushed to stillness; the sunshine lay calmly upon the tree-tops and the distant hills.

In the center of the lawn a magnificent cedar spread its level branches, forming an almost impenetrable shelter. At the foot of its mighty twisted trunk a little rustic bench waited humbly.

Mrs. Kemys came slowly down the oak staircase, passed the tall blue jars of pot-pourri on either side of the open doorway,— and crossed the lawn to her favourite seat.

The setting was romantic, but there was nothing romantic in her appearance.

She was about forty years old, though she looked considerably older.

Her face was careworn and colourless; her thin hair parted above her brow was of that nondescript tint which is the intermediate between gold and grey.

An anxious doubting spirit looked pathetically from faded blue eyes; but the features were regular and the face of a delicate oval shape, though the cheeks and temples were so thin as to present almost a sunken appearance.

Her dress was of the kind, which in a time gone by would have been called ladylike, because unnoticeable. It was of a flimsy black stuff dignified

with silk trimmings, and obviously the creation of a provincial or village dressmaker. She wore as her sole ornament an old-fashioned pearl brooch containing her father's and mother's hair: the white and the brown entwined. It fastened a narrow collar of old lace.

Yet dowdy, shabby, faded as she was, she bore herself with the unconscious quiet dignity of good breeding; and in spite of her slight stoop and thinness, there was something of grace in her movements.

She seated herself beneath the cedar, put her work-basket,—no pretty toy, but a solid receptacle for mending, upon the rustic table before her, and devoted her attention to darning prosaic black hose.

She was not perhaps, insensible to the beauty around her, but she was too much engrossed with her own reflections to heed it consciously. Sewing does not hinder, but rather encourages thought; and the rhythm of the needle can form a pleasant accompaniment to the wordless song of memory or anticipation.

Between the two her reflections hovered, rather than fix themselves upon the present, from which her mind perhaps, welcomed the escape.

Annette Kemys, whose spirit the thatcher believed to be broken, was by nature of a sanguine disposition: the doubts and fears, engendered by the daily worries of a life which circumstances had not rendered an easy one, were apt to be dispersed with

almost surprising facility under favourable conditions.

Just now the conditions were favourable: the monthly bills had been settled; her husband had been unusually good-tempered at breakfast: her children, so far as she knew, were all well; the sun was shining, and the spirit of spring, joy-compelling, was in the air. The lines on the white face relaxed, and the light blue eyes, bent upon the task in hand, grew tender and introspective.

A house-mother, however, is seldom permitted to taste the soothing influence of solitude.

Mrs. Kemys worked for half an hour undisturbed; and then the sound of young voices preceded the appearance of a little procession which issued from the dark doorway,—curtained with white clematis,—of the south front, into the brilliance of the morning sunshine.

Mrs. Kemys looked up and a faint smile dawned in her tired eyes, and played about the delicately shaped mouth: a smile instinct with those mingled feelings of tenderness, pride and amusement, with which a mother looks upon her children; above all upon her children growing up.

Annie led the little procession as was her wont. Tall and gracious, in the first careless loveliness of maidenhood, she was so pretty that the shabbiness of her washed-out pink cotton frock and the mended brim of her coarse straw hat mattered nothing at all,

if she had but known it. But she did not know it, and her soul was mortified within her whenever she remembered the deficiencies of her attire.

A glance at Annie revealed her mother's past beauty; a glance at her mother betrayed the possibilities of Annie's future.

The little boys, Corney and Manuel, held on to their sister, and danced round her, and were alternately petted and pushed away according to her mood and fancy, without conscious intention on one side or the slightest resentment on the other. And Sophy followed behind, which was also characteristic of Sophy, and an equally unconscious manifestation of her attitude towards her elder sister. Sophy followed carrying some empty baskets and grumbling. She always grumbled, but nevertheless she always found herself carrying the baskets. A fair skin, light blue eyes, abundant flaxen hair and a retroussé nose, were Sophy's portion. She was not so tall as Annie, and her piquant prettiness was of small account beside that frank loveliness.

She had a trim little figure and wore a blue cotton gown. Sophy preferred pink, but Annie said it was absurd for sisters to dress alike, so Sophy, protesting, wore blue, and failed to observe that it became her better than rose-colour.

"We are going to the woods to get primroses, mother."

"My dears, the little boys haven't said their lessons"—in reproving indulgent tones.

"If you'll hear them now, Mamma, they could come with us," said Annie, coaxingly; and one or two shabby lesson books were produced timidly by the small students.

Seven year old Corney said his column of spelling without a mistake, and standing beside his mother with a sturdy pointed elbow digging into her thin shoulder, he looked over the book and audibly prompted his little brother.

She shook her head, but allowed the strong sun-burnt little hand to close the book and hand up another tattered volume.

Little Manuel's alarmed eyes never left his brother's face as he stumbled over his multiplication table, but with the help of nods and frowns from Corney and his mother's indulgence, he managed to get through his lesson, and the two little boys were released, and flew round the lawn, shrieking joyfully.

"Don't let Manuel get his feet wet."

"Mamma, you say that automatically whatever the weather is. As if we should, when we know what a to-do there is if he catches the commonest cold."

The little girl who was Manuel's twin sister had died of consumption, and Mrs. Kemys sighed.

"My dear, he is so delicate."

Annie reproved Manuel with elder sisterly candour as the child returned panting to the cedar, with his face flushed and his great eyes shining.

"Don't go overheating yourself, to begin with,

you little donkey," she said, first shaking and then hugging him.

They went away across the sunny lawn, Corney running back to kiss his mother with the honest warmth which his kind little heart dictated. He embraced her with the natural roughness of extreme youth which he shared with the boisterous puppy gambolling at his heels, and the white-faced Hereford calf buffeting its grave parent in the meadow beyond the garden paling.

Mrs. Kemys settled her ruffled hair and collar placidly, and returned to her work with a sigh of content.

After all, life held many pleasant hours.

The little boys — her face softened at the familiar term, which was, to her, a term of endearment in itself — the little boys were so merry and affectionate and so fond of each other. There was no quarrelling between them as there had been always between Rodric and Courtenay, her elder sons. But those two had been on even terms, whereas Corney, young as he was, would have scorned to squabble with such a poor little weakling as Manuel.

Perhaps she had been imprudent to let Manuel go into the woods in the wet moss — but his boots were thick; the nailed clodhopping boots of the little country lad; and Annie would take care of him. She was always good to the little boys.

Her pretty Annie — again the smile stole about the

mother's lips, and irradiated the faded face bent over the mending basket.

"Annette, where are you?"

"I am here, Richard, under the cedar. Do you want me? I'll come."

"No, stay where you are. I'll come out."

Richard Kemys strode across the lawn with a packet of letters in his hand, and the London newspapers, which had just arrived, in a bundle under his arm.

He was a big broad-shouldered powerfully built man, in his fiftieth year; he was inclined to stoutness, and the thick hair pushed off his frowning brow, was iron-grey.

His bearing was characterized by an indefinable suggestion of aggressiveness. His deep-coloured blue eyes were choleric, twinkling angrily beneath eyebrows that met across the bridge of his nose. His ruddy face was clean-shaven, and his features, though large, were undeniably handsome; but the jaw was too heavy, and the corners of the mouth turned down.

"Sewing as usual. Aren't there maids enough about, eating their heads off, that you must be always wrapped up in your stitching whenever I want you," he said, pulling forward a garden chair and seating himself with unnecessary force. "Where are those idle girls, gadding off as usual?"

"It is such a beautiful morning," said his wife, deprecatingly. "I gave them leave to go primrosing. Annie wanted to fill the drawing-room vases this morning, and you know you do not like the garden flowers to be gathered."

Richard Kemys looked sharply round at the well-filled flower beds and his frown relaxed slightly. He had a weakness for his garden.

"I should think she might find something better to do than go primrosing at her age," he grumbled.

"Oh Richard. What is the child to do? now that she is eighteen and her lessons done with. It is not so easy to find a great deal to do for a girl at home. We may be thankful she enjoys such innocent pleasures, which cost nothing," said Mrs. Kemys, sighing.

"If she busied herself with sensible work she could save the keep of a servant, I suppose? But no, she and her sister must sit with their hands in their laps, to be waited upon," he said roughly.

"They took the little boys for their walk. Sharman is always busy on Monday morning and glad to get them out of her way."

"Does it need two strapping young females to take a couple of shavers like that for a walk?" said Mr. Kemys, with an angry laugh. "Why should they want to go for a walk? Isn't the garden good enough for them to play in? Or the stableyard? It was good enough for my brothers and me at that age, I can tell you."

"I daresay it isn't exactly necessary," said the poor lady, "but they are always so happy — running after Annie.— You said you wanted me, Richard?"

"Of course you turn the conversation, you always do if I say a word about the children," he said, with heavy displeasure. "But I've come to talk about them for all that, at least about one of them."

She dropped her work, upon which her eyes had been steadily fastened, and looked anxiously at the lowering face opposite her. Mr. Kemys laid his papers, with the bundle of letters uppermost, upon the rustic table.

"Is — is there anything wrong with the boys?" she faltered.

"Aye, you are interested enough now," he said, with that angry laugh which jarred upon her every nerve, and which was the form of merriment to which Richard Kemys was addicted when things went wrong.

The woman who had been his devoted wife for two and twenty years, who had borne him seven children, and who knew every intonation of his voice and every expression of his face, was uneasy now as she looked and listened.

"Is it Courtenay — or — or Rodric?" she asked nervously.

"We all know that Courtenay can do no wrong," he said, evidently willing to trifle with her suspense by indulging a heavy satire intended for playfulness. "Courtenay is the model boy; the martyr who was

sent to a cheap provincial school and revenged himself by winning all the scholarships, and going up to idle away the best years of his life at Oxford, instead of working as his father did before him. You wouldn't believe anything bad of Courtenay even if I told you."

Mr. Kemys was under the erroneous impression that Courtenay was his mother's favourite son, but she cherished that secret preference for her first-born which is common to many women, and was only thankful that the weakness had been so successfully hidden in her heart.

"Perhaps Roddy would be the more likely to get into a scrape of the two," she said guardedly, "but I do not think either of them particularly inclined to get into scrapes, for if Courtenay is the more conscientious in little things, Roddy has the most common sense, and he would not do anything he believed dishonourable or unworthy for the whole world, poor boy."

The poor lady knew that her sons were not perfect, that they quarrelled only too often with each other, and were sometimes as impatient of her gentle rule as of their father's harshness. But she looked into her own heart, and found it full of imperfections, and thought also, in spite of herself, of their father's faults. How could she expect perfection from their children?

"The poor boy, as you call him," said Mr. Kemys, allowing his anger full play at last, "has had the

impudence to write and ask me to approve of his leaving Jacobs & Bernstein's office, and to give him some capital to play with into the bargain. *Him* some capital! He would be satisfied, he says very kindly, with a thousand pounds, if I can't spare more. *If I can't spare more!* He wishes, it appears, to go off to the Argentine and seek his fortune with Jack Meredydd and one or two other young fools. And he has the further impudence to remind me that he came of age last week, and that he only consented to work in the office until he was entitled to his independence. I'll show him what his independence means. Nantgwilt's no longer entailed, and I'd rather leave it to Corney any day than to Rodric, with his confounded cheek and airs of knowing something about the farm and the management of the estate; or to his priggish bookworm of a brother either."

"I'm sorry Roddy said anything about his coming of age, but boys don't always think what is wisest. He is impulsive, but I'm certain he meant no impudence," said Mrs. Kemys, taking up her work with trembling hands. "But so long as he's not got into any trouble — I was afraid —"

"What were you afraid of? You are always afraid of something. One would think a woman of your age had got over such timidity. The fact is you know lots of their misdoings which you take care to hide from me, and are alarmed lest I should find you out."

"I know I am always afraid of something. It is foolish of me," she said, trying to smile, "though it is certainly not of their misdoings, as you call it. But when one has two sons out in the world —"

"Out in the world! The one psalm-singing at Oxford, and the other nailed to his desk in the city," said Mr. Kemys, derisively. "And there he shall stop, mind that, for all the help he'll get from me."

"I wish you wouldn't make up your mind to that without hearing what the boy has to say, Richard," she said, pleadingly. "Be fair to him, even if — sometimes I almost think —"

"Well — why don't you end your sentence? You have a maddening way of stopping short in the middle."

"I beg your pardon, but it seemed a monstrous thing to say," she faltered, colouring. "I have felt at times that since poor Roddy grew up you have almost — disliked him."

"When a boy grows up to be everything you disapprove of most, you can't be expected to like him particularly," said Mr. Kemys. "What's he done to make me like him?"

"He's been a good boy, Richard," she said simply. "Of course I know he didn't do as well at school as Courtenay, but it's not in everybody's power to get scholarships. And he was good at games."

"Good at games!" repeated her husband, in scorn unspeakable.

"I daresay he neglected his lessons a little," she

went on, with unusual persistence, "being captain of his cricket eleven, and so forth; but all the same it was a great blow to him when you took him away from school and set your face against his going into the army. It was very hard for him to give in. And he's been wonderfully steady at the office work. Three years is a long time, Richard, for a boy of his age. You know how much he hates it."

"Why should he hate it? That's what I want to know. I didn't hate office work," cried Mr. Kemys.

"How can I tell why? We're all different. I daresay he hasn't your ability for business. You know I have none whatever. He may have taken after me. But going out to one of these new countries — cattle ranching — it's just been the dream of his life to do that if he couldn't become a soldier. And as for the thousand pounds, why, dear Richard, think how often you've told us all of your opportunity to start yourself in life, and how it came with the legacy your godmother left you. Isn't it natural that Roddy should want *his* chance too, to make a fortune?"

"Who told you I made a fortune?" growled Mr. Kemys. "He won't get a thousand pounds out of me to go to the dogs with, nor yet a thousand pence. It's sticking to work that makes fortunes, not going on wild goose chases to the other end of the world."

She was silent.

"The young blackguard has written to you too, apparently," said Mr. Kemys, and he sorted the bun-

dle before him, and handed her a letter with a grudging air.

The post-bag came to Nantgwilt soon after breakfast, and the master of the house unlocked it, and gave forth the contents to the household at his own will and pleasure.

If he were otherwise occupied it might lie for an hour or more unopened upon the hall table. No one else dared to touch it, nor to unfold the newspapers which were taken instantly to his study.

He communicated what news he chose to the assembled family at luncheon, where he could also thunder forth his own political opinions in the pleasing certainty that he would not be contradicted, whether he elected to condemn the Government, or abuse the tactics of the opposition. His eloquence flowed more easily in the direction of censure than of praise.

Mrs. Kemys was obliged to open her son's letter in the presence of her lord, but Rodric had known that she would probably be obliged to do so, and she knew that he knew, so that she opened it without any qualms.

Under the circumstances, however, it proved to be a trifle more outspoken than usual, even for Rodric, who dealt in frankness.

"Mother, dear," the boy wrote, "I shall be with you before long now, for Easter, but before I come, try and make my father understand that I'm in earnest about going to the Argentine. I've written him

all the details, and reminded him that I always said I wouldn't go on with my office work after I was one and twenty. I've ornamented a three-legged stool for three solid years to please him and I like it no better now than I did at the start, but sticking it out like that ought to show the governor I've got the stuff in me. The old josser here finds fault now and then, of course, just to keep his hand in, but there's never been a real complaint. Remind Papa how my education was cut short and how I wasn't allowed even to try for the army. That was hard enough to bear, though I'm willing to admit I mightn't have got through with the exams. It takes a bookish fellow like Courtenay, who'd hate practical soldiering, to get into the army nowadays. But what's the good of being a man, mother dear, if one can't follow one's bent. You see how calmly and reasonably I'm writing, not impetuously, for once, am I?

"If my father would give me the money I ask for he'd never repent it. I swear he wouldn't.

"We've planned it all out very carefully. There are five of us in it, including Jack Meredydd. His uncle, John Meredydd, who used to be in old Turley's office in Llysddinam once, has been out there for years, and has a great *estancia* in Santa Fé. He will stand in with us, and help us to start for ourselves. It's too long to write about. Now you see why I've been so keen over learning Spanish. It's not a bit of use to hope to get on without it, I'm told, and I've a pretty useful smattering now. Each

of the fellows in our trusty little syndicate has got something, and it would be bitter hard luck upon me, that am the only eldest son in the bunch, if my father won't spare me anything.

"But it won't stop my going, for I've got my heart in it, and know more about it than the others, who are cockneys, poor chaps, except Jack; but all as keen as mustard. Do try and get Papa to see it from my point of view, mother dear.

"Your affec. son,

"RODRIC KEMYS."

Very faintly in the extreme corner of the letter were scribbled — *Go to Granny.*

Mrs. Kemys was inured to the necessity for small duplicities. When she handed the letter meekly across to her waiting spouse, the corner of the paper was torn off.

His comment was characteristic.

"An eldest son, is he? I'll show him whether he's an eldest son or not," said Richard Kemys, with a laugh.

CHAPTER II

'ANNIE AMONG THE PRIMROSES

THE woods above Llanon were still brown, save for the snow of the wild cherry and the pale emerald of the larch.

Annie chose a mountain path that led upwards through a coppice which had been thinned a year earlier, so that the little party came out upon a comparatively open space, where only trees of a certain age remained standing.

The graceful silver birch, tossing delicate feathery sprays, faintly promising foliage to come; the straight young oaks, and the smooth-stemmed beech,—stood out upon the cleared woodland against the blue sky; and from a bed of moss and dead leaves the primroses had sprung in their thousands as though by magic; in glad response to the call of the sunshine and the winds after many seasons of darkness.

“Surely we have climbed far enough,” said Sophy, seating herself upon a stump, and eying the exquisite spring carpet spread at her feet, with calm indifference. “One could not wish for a better bird’s eye view of the village than one gets from here.”

“You have come to pick primroses, not to look

at the village," said Annie, going down upon her knees and setting to work. "Ah, don't tread on their dear little faces, boys; they are so happy looking up at the sun."

Corney ostentatiously tiptoed through the yellow masses, and set to work industriously beside his sister; who with deft fingers tied the primroses into bunches as she gathered and tossed them into the basket. But Sophy remained seated, looking down upon the little world below which lay exposed to her view.

"How plainly you can see into the garden of the Red House from here. There are old Perina and Cynthia Byewater, poking about among their vegetables as usual. I should think they would get sick of gardening from morning till night, with their old faces hidden in their old sun-bonnets. I suppose they are afraid of spoiling their complexions."

Annie laughed with the candid whole-hearted amusement of the young girl who has never yet taken thought for the preservation of her good looks, and who believes that her beauty will last, though surrounded by a hundred evidences to the contrary.

"Everybody seems out and about this morning," said Sophy vivaciously; for though the primroses did not interest her, the movements of her neighbours did.

"The spring is calling them," said Annie.

"Old Meredydd is trotting down the street in his broad-brimmed hat. There is a dogcart coming —

the doctor of course. I bet anything he'll stop and speak. Yes, Dr. Harries is getting out. He's going to see old Mother Byewater, though there's not a thing the matter with her."

"When one is her age one is always more or less ill, I suppose," said Annie, leniently. "And besides it's the only chance poor old Perry and Cider have of talking to a man."

"A man of fifty!" said Sophy, and they both laughed.

"I daresay fifty doesn't seem so very old to *them*," said the indulgent Annie. "You *are* idle, Sophy."

Sophy rose with a sigh and picked two or three primroses, wandering a few steps further afield, and altogether indifferent to the charming picture presented by her pretty sister, who knelt in the sunshine, which played fitfully through the interlacing boughs upon the pure transparent colour of her oval face; though the brim of her straw hat cast a shadow over her long-lashed eyes.

Sophy dawdled and gathered and presently strolled round a curve in the slope which hid her altogether.

A few moments later the sound of voices made Annie look up from her all-absorbing task. Sophy was returning in haste, and by her side was a young man, a sturdy freckled young man, with kind grey eyes, and a pleasant honest countenance.

The flush upon Annie's face deepened, but Annie

blushed at everything or at nothing. She rose and straightened her young limbs, cramped with kneeling; and held out her hand, which was eagerly taken.

"I couldn't think who it was. I didn't know you were home, Jack," with the calmness of an old playmate.

"I only came late last night," said young Meredydd, "and when I went over to the Manor House this morning, old Pryse said you had gone prim-rosing."

"A little further round the slope," said Sophy, evincing scant interest in this explanation, "you can see into our garden *very* plainly. Mamma is still sitting under the cedar and Papa has taken out the newspapers. He is waving them about like anything. I expect they are having a row."

"They've got old Roddy's letter this morning," said Jack.

"Rodric's letter! What can he have written about when he's coming home so soon?" said both girls. They were interested immediately.

Then Annie gave a warning glance at the little boys. "Go round the slope, Corney, and take Manuel with you, and see what Mamma is doing. But don't come back till I call you."

Corney reluctantly removed himself and his brother out of earshot.

"One must be careful before the children," said Annie, with the dignity of eighteen. "Now, Jack."

"Well, he said I might tell you," said young Meredydd. "He's going to chuck the office."

"Of course, I knew he would do that as soon as he was one and twenty," said Rodric's favourite sister, proudly. "He always meant to."

"But what will he do instead?" Sophy said, round-eyed.

"Go out to the Argentine," said Annie.

"You knew!"

"I knew he would, sooner or later. Oh, Jack! He hasn't gone — without telling us?"

"No — no. But he's written to tell them, and he's given notice at the office — burnt his boats."

"Oh, dear," said Sophy. "How unpleasant luncheon will be to-day!"

"I hope he's doing wisely, but it's a long, long way for him to go, poor Roddy, away from us all," said Annie rather mournfully.

"I'm going with him," said young Meredydd, modestly.

Her fair brow cleared.

"Then you'll be able to take care of him," she said; but perceiving the mortified expression of his open face, she added hastily, "we shall be very sorry to lose you, too, Jack, of course."

"I wish I could think so," he said in a low voice; with a quick glance that escaped even Sophy's lynx eyes.

"It will be duller than ever when you've gone.

After all, you're the only young man in Llanon," said Sophy. "We could *pretend* to dance at Christmas with one young man to dance with besides the boys — now there'll be no one. Courtenay hates dancing, and you'll be away." She looked from one to the other in dismay.

"Our Christmas parties were always failures," said Annie, consolingly. "They generally ended in a row. Last year Papa boxed Corney's ears for upsetting the snapdragon dish; and sent me to bed, for saying it was a shame."

Jack Meredydd grew red.

"You left in a huff, Jack, and very nice it was of you to take my part," said Annie, warmly.

"I never heard of any one being sent to bed at seventeen," he said, as though in excuse.

"Rodric said it would be his last Christmas at home for many a long day," said Annie. "*When* are you going, Jack?"

"As soon as possible after Easter."

"At least he will be here, and Courtenay too, for Easter," said Annie. "That's something."

"Who'll pay Roddy's passage — for I'm sure Papa won't," said Sophy, who had a practical mind.

"I expect he's saved enough money for that; and if he hasn't somebody's sure to lend it to him," said young Meredydd, looking away. "There are five of us going. We shall all stand by one another, you may be sure. Of course Rodric hopes your father will do something for him."

"I should have thought he would have known Papa better by this time," said Sophy, scornfully.

"After all, he's the eldest son," said Jack. "Having come of age puts him, in a way, on a different footing!"

Annie seated herself on a fallen log, and glanced at Sophy, and the meaning of her glance was as clear to her sister as though she had spoken the words, *Leave me alone with him, I shall get more out of him by myself.*

Sophy sauntered after the little boys.

Young Meredydd stood looking down upon the maiden among the primroses. The washed-out pink cotton gown betrayed every line of Annie's pretty figure; and the sunshine searched the delicate bloom of her face without revealing a single flaw.

"How kind of Sophy to go," he said, warmly. "I wanted to see you alone, Annie. I hope she won't come back."

"I made her a sign to go," said Annie, calmly. "I wanted to ask you—oh, Jack!" She leant forward and looked up at him, clasping her hands. "Rodric hasn't got into any trouble?"

"No, no," he hastened to reassure her. "Why should you be always worrying about Rodric. He's a splendid fellow and as steady as old Time in his own way. Why should you think he's in trouble just because he wants to get away from office-work which doesn't suit him a bit?"

"Oh, I don't know. He's a boy," said Annie,

sagely. "People always seem to expect boys to get into trouble of one kind or another. That's why they invented the excuse that Boys will be boys. No one ever says Girls will be girls."

"One expects a girl to be more or less of an angel," he said; and reddened as he stooped to gather some white violets which he discerned hiding in a clump of moss beside the log. He searched for a wisp of dry grass to tie them together, making up a tiny bunch very carefully.

"It is not a question of being angels," said Annie simply. "It is just that we have more common sense. We don't expect to get everything we want. Jack, do you really think there's any chance of Papa's giving Roddy money because he's come of age?"

"I think it will be an infernal shame if he doesn't," said Jack, with the frankness of life-long intimacy. "Rodric is heir to Nantgwilt, and everyone knows what that's worth, more or less."

"I don't know," said Annie quickly. "Jack, I'm grown-up now, and yet I don't know one single thing about Papa's affairs. I don't believe poor Mamma does, either. If anybody knows what Nantgwilt is worth I might surely know. Why shouldn't you tell me?"

"I only know what all the neighbourhood knows — vaguely," he said, reluctantly. "I mean, of course it's a big estate — and very good land — and the farms are all very well let."

"Everything's let," said Annie, rather bitterly,

"and all the produce of the home-farm sold. Mamma has trouble enough to get milk for the little boys. Oh, Jack, what's the good of pretending with *you*, whom we've known all our lives? I've so often wondered since I grew up whether Papa is really — so poor. Mamma says nothing, but you know how things get into the air. Don't hide anything from me."

"Indeed — indeed — I wouldn't. But I know no more than Rodric and Courtenay and all of you must know quite well. Of course your father has — has the reputation of being a very careful man."

"That means he's a miser."

He protested.

"But there are so many of us," she said, wistfully, "and boys are expensive though girls cost so little. Perhaps Papa is obliged to be careful."

Jack Meredydd could not tell her his opinion of Richard Kemys. He was silent.

"I know the boys think all the pinching and screwing unnecessary," she said, looking at him with questioning eyes. "Do *you* think so?"

Young Meredydd could not resist the look, though he desired sincerely to change the subject.

"Yes, I do; since you ask me," he said, briefly. "Of course I've no business to speak of your father's affairs — it would be beastly cheek on my part —"

"But since I ask you?" said Annie, softly.

"Since you ask me," he said colouring, "Why then — the Nantgwilt estate must bring in two or

three thousand a year at the very least — if it brings in a penny.”

“Two or three thousand a year,” said Annie, under her breath.

“I should think three a very low estimate,” said Jack; now that he had fairly started he went recklessly on to the finish. “No doubt there are the outgoings — but everyone says he was a rich man when he succeeded your grandfather. Of course he may have lost money in his business since.”

“Lost money!” said Annie, quickly. “He has boasted to us over and over again that since he started life as a younger son with a thousand pounds *pour tout potage*, he has never lost a halfpenny. But I thought the estate perhaps swallowed up all he had made. Jack — if he’s rich — if he’s even decently well off,— what a shame — what a *shame* to have let poor Mamma work and slave and pinch and scrape all these years, and to have had all these rows with the boys over the expenses of their education —” she stopped short. “I suppose I oughtn’t to say such things, but you’ve seen it all. It’s just as though you were one of our own brothers.”

There was a moment’s pause, and then he said, without looking at her:

“But I want — to be more to you than your brother — Annie. You know I’ve always loved you — in a different way from that — ever since I can remember.”

Annie knew it, but she uttered a faint sound of reproach or protest.

Jack Meredydd suddenly found himself reflecting that it was much more difficult to make love to a girl he had known all his life, than to a stranger.

He came and sat beside her, on the log. "Annie dear," he said, straightforwardly, "I'm four and twenty now; at that age a fellow knows his own mind. I've never really loved a girl in my life but you; and even if — if I've been — a little attracted now and then, by others —" said poor Jack, who was as honest as he was susceptible, "I've never even for a moment dreamt of asking any girl in the world to be my wife except you. I've always known I wanted it to be Annie Kemys or nobody. I hadn't any money — to speak of — and so I didn't dare ask you — but my old pater, now I've convinced him at last that I never would, and never could be a parson, is going to hand over my poor mother's little capital to me at once; so I shall have my chance. I mean to make a fortune in the Argentine just as Rodric does. Annie *darling*, will you wait for me — will you? and marry me when I come back?"

Young Meredydd, though but an awkward and inexperienced lover, was so much in earnest that the unaccustomed term of endearment rang truly, if strangely in Annie's ears, and brought the warm colour to her cheek, and the facile tears to her blue eyes.

"Annie *darling*, will you wait for me?"

Annie was tired of her dreams, woven about imaginary heroes or knightly figures of the past. She was ripe for love and brimming with romance as became a maiden of her years. And there is a magic in the first words of wooing actually spoken by a living being of flesh and blood, which transcends the magic of imagination: the surroundings also appealed to her sense of the fitness of things, the sunshine and warmth and stillness of the perfect April morning — the incense of the woodlands — the rapturous song of the birds among the brown branches.

Yet her long eyelashes drooped, as though to hide the regret and disappointment that caused her tears to flow.

Poor young Meredydd, watching the lovely downcast face, luckily could not divine the thought in her mind. Oh, if it had been anyone but Jack!

To wait while her lover made his fortune — what was that? A period of ecstasy, of dreams brightened by the reading and writing of love letters, by the anticipation of golden hours ever drawing nearer; of meeting, of happiness, of triumph — the glory of a wedding, the romance of a honeymoon, the dignity of a home of her own.

To be poor? She had never known anything else, Annie thought with a sigh, for she coveted pretty dresses and trinkets with all the ardour of a healthy normal young female, but she scorned the notion of weighing these in the balance with love. To be con-

stant in absence? Annie was too frank not to be true.

But to give up — on the very threshold of womanhood — all the wonderful possibilities that the future might hold, for the sake of the good honest prosaic boy whom she had known all her life, who had taken her part in childish squabbles, and thrown apples to her over the garden wall, and seen her at her worst as a badly dressed, long-legged schoolgirl, who had no single illusion concerning her — this prospect filled her with dismay.

She could not bear to disappoint Jack — Annie was tender-hearted — still less did she desire to go husbandless to her grave, for she possessed a horror of spinsterhood not unnatural in a very young girl who had been brought up in circles where women who do not marry are looked upon as failures, and are neither adequately provided for by others, nor permitted to work for themselves.

She combined a strong common sense with the inexperience of her youth, and said to herself with a sinking heart that here was probably her first and last offer of marriage. She thought of the two Miss Byewaters in alarm, and of the dulness of Nantgwilt in despair. But even these fears for her future did not make it possible for her to connect honest Jack with the romance which she felt, rather indignantly, would have been so appropriate to the occasion and the season, and to her own wishes.

She looked down upon the brown hand with its

rather short plebeian fingers and square nails which Jack had ventured, as a shy approach to a caress, to lay gently upon the handle of the basket-full of primroses in her lap, and the impulse to draw away from it became irresistible.

"Oh Jack, I couldn't," she said.

The tone was so unmistakably sincere that it really left no room for a lover's pleading, which is, after all, most eloquent when resistance is felt to be rather assumed than real.

"Then I shan't have anything to work for if you won't wait for me," he said, blankly.

"You'll have just as much as Rodric. I hope *he* isn't thinking of marrying," said Annie, in maternal reproof. "And you know," suddenly melting, "it isn't that I wouldn't wait — or anything of that kind, dear Jack, but only that I can't think of you in any other sort of way but — the sort of way I've thought of you all my life."

"All right," said Jack, awkwardly, "I understand."

Annie felt that even if he had taken her refusal differently there might have been more chance of her repenting her decision. But poor Jack was no hero of romance, and did nothing appropriate to the occasion.

He re-twisted the shred of dry grass round the tiny bunch of scented white violets, and instead of offering them to her with a reproachful glance which would have haunted her memory with remorse, he

fitted them very carefully into his own button-hole.

Suddenly an inspiration appeared to visit him. He looked up.

"You might," he suggested, "feel like this now, and yet come to think differently in two or three years, when you haven't seen me for a long time."

"I *might*," said Annie, doubtfully. Perhaps a feminine reluctance to let her suitor go altogether, dictated her next words.

"I'll try to — unless —"

"Unless what?"

Her perception of his stupidity made her tone impatient.

"Unless I fell in love with any one else, of course. Not that I'm likely even to see any one else — here," she added, with unaffected regret.

The reflection, however, brought comfort to Jack, and as he hated the unwonted sensation of melancholy, he accepted even so small a consolation with alacrity.

"After all," he thought, "I must give her time to get used to the idea. It's no use trying to rush a girl."

"Even a little hope — that it might all come right some day, would make all the difference to me," he remarked, with a brightening face. "I couldn't expect you to jump at me, could I? I only wanted you to know what I wish, and always shall wish; the whole world is welcome to know it; for I shall never love any one else as I love you, Annie."

At this appropriate moment Sophy thought fit to return with the little boys, and interrupt the tête-à-tête, which she judged had lasted long enough for the extraction of all Jack's secrets. The slight apprehension with which she looked at Annie was instantly relieved by her sister's imperceptible nod.

"Oh, Sophy, what a quantity of primroses you have gathered."

"I had nothing else to do," said Sophy. "If only I had brought Papa's field-glasses I could have seen what everybody was about so much more distinctly. Mamma is alone now, so I suppose Papa got tired of rowing her and went in to read the newspapers."

"Then since we have plenty of primroses now, let's go home," said Annie.

"I'll come with you," said Jack. "I've got all our plans and calculations written out to show your father. It's not that Rodric funk'd it, of course, but he couldn't get away from his work, and I had to bring them to show my old pater. Besides, I'm the senior partner, so to speak."

"It had much better be you," said Annie, "you are calm, and Papa won't bully you, and Rodric is hot-tempered and can't bear being mocked at, poor boy."

"Nobody could mock at a sensible project like this," said Jack, stoutly, but he affected a confidence he did not feel, for he believed that Richard Kemys was quite capable of mocking the poor little syndicate he represented.

CHAPTER III

THE PARSON IN THE VILLAGE

OLD Mr. Meredydd was a widower with an only son. He had been rector of Llanon for five and thirty years, and had known the father and the elder brothers of Richard Kemys.

He was a rosy-faced, white bearded, cheerful old man, not remarkable for discretion, nor for any great amount of intelligence; but his manner was kind, his deeds were charitable, and his expression benign. The discerning villagers said of him indulgently, that he meant well.

His beautiful old church, that was so out of proportion to the population of Llanon, was not very well filled, because most of his flock preferred the little iron Bethel they had put up at their own expense: but he bore this misfortune with resignation, visited churchgoers and chapelgoers alike, and filled up his spare time with antiquarian research in a country abounding with geological and historical interest.

Mr. Meredydd was fond of his son and proud of him; and though it was a disappointment that Jack refused to enter the church, he was easily persuaded to consent to his trying a very different career.

"If you don't like it, my boy, you can always come back," he said in his old trembling voice, that had never uttered a harsh word to his son. "As long as I'm alive, there'll always be a welcome for you, so don't be afraid to let me know quite frankly if the scheme doesn't turn out a success after all. I grant you it looks well, very well indeed, on paper. But youth is inclined to be sanguine, and there may be drawbacks we know nothing about. But you'll do your best, I know that very well indeed, my lad, and it's not as though you were going alone. But all the same you mustn't be afraid to come home and tell me if it's a failure."

Jack laughed in his sleeve at the notion of his being afraid to tell his father anything, and assured him that failure was impossible. Then, carried away by the old man's sympathy, he could not resist making him a further confidence.

Mr. Meredydd listened with delight, for Annie Kemys was a favourite with him, as with all the inhabitants of Llanon; and being troubled by no diffidence concerning his son's personal attractions, the possibility of disappointment never remotely occurred to him.

Jack had chosen wisely, he said, chuckling, and he detained Jack, then burning to pursue his suit, to assure him once more that if the Argentine project failed he must not be too deeply concerned.

There would be enough to start life with, for a young couple who had been brought up to be careful

and prudent. Jack could look about him and take up another career at his leisure. There were plenty of paths open to a young man who had got through the University so creditably.

Jack listened impatiently to his father's platitudes, and escaped as soon as he could to the Manor House.

When he was gone, Mr. Meredydd took his hat and stick, and trotted down the village street.

The possession of such a secret warmed his heart, and made his greetings to the passers-by doubly kind and amiable.

"A beautiful spring morning," he cried out to the doctor. "It does one good to be alive on such a morning as this, eh, Harries?"

"You look as if it did," said the doctor, who had fewer causes for self-congratulation.

He jumped down and greeted his old friend.

"I wish you'd carry some of your cheerfulness into the house I've just left."

"So I will, so I will," said the rector, zealously, "the post-office, I'm afraid?"

"Poor young Prickard is dying," said the doctor.

"Is he worse? I saw him yesterday, he looked better."

"Another hemorrhage; nothing can save him this time. Well his life need not have been sacrificed; if he'd gone off to South Africa with his brother; they were much in the same state, and I've capital accounts of the other fellow. However—" the doctor shrugged his shoulders—"he wouldn't go.

How any of you can live in this basin among the hills, passes me."

"I've lived here thirty-five years," said Mr. Meredydd, rather displeased. "You won't get me to own there's anything wrong with the climate. It's a bit moist."

"Moist! It's a vapour bath!"

"The Prickards have consumption in the family."

"They are not the only family in Llanon with a tendency that way," said Dr. Harries, and he nodded farewell and ran up the steps of the Red House, to pay his weekly visit to old Mrs. Byewater.

Mr. Meredydd went on his way with his cheerfulness somewhat impaired. He thought of the number of his parishioners who had fallen victims of the scourge of the west country, during his long residence in Llanon; among the names that rose to his memory was that of little Lucy Kemys.

"But I never heard of any other Kemys having a tendency to anything of the kind," he thought. "Kemys himself is as strong as an ox, and I never remember Mrs. Kemys having a day's illness, except when her babies were born. They are all very healthy, except perhaps little Manuel. Certainly little Manuel is a delicate child. But he is the youngest, and no doubt his mother has been over careful with him. Still, he *does* remind me of poor little Lucy. I wish Richard Kemys did not carry his prejudice against doctors quite so far. I don't care for over much doctoring myself — but there's reason

in all things — Manuel wants looking after no doubt. Bless me, I wish the doctor had not put such an idea into my head."

The rector like his son, could not bear melancholy, and preferred always to take an optimistic view. He determined to call in at the Manor House, feeling vaguely that a glance at that clear-complexioned, bright-eyed, well-grown family, would dispel the uneasiness created by the doctor's words. He was enabled to put this plan into execution the sooner because on calling at the post-office, Mrs. Prickard informed him that the invalid was asleep, and asked him to postpone his visit.

The rector promised to come again later in the day, and returning on his way, called at the Manor House and found Mrs. Kemys in her favourite resting-place beneath the cedar, occupied with her sewing.

She was very glad to see him, and still more glad to learn that the Argentine scheme which concerned her so nearly, met with his approval.

The rector was not, perhaps, very practical, but at least he was a man, and Mrs. Kemys had been brought up to a blind belief in the masculine business capacity.

"If you could only talk it over with my husband! I am afraid he is very much against Rodric's going," she said.

She was aware of Richard's contempt for Mr. Meredydd's understanding, but the rector's mild per-

suasions might possibly induce him to listen to Rodric's arguments in favour of the scheme.

"Jack is coming over to do that. He has all the particulars at his fingers' ends. I do not see how Mr. Kemys can object. My brother has been out there for years. He is acting as their adviser, and I need hardly say he is to be depended upon," said Mr. Meredydd, amused at the bare possibility that a relative of his own could be distrusted.

"Rodric is our eldest son," said Mrs. Kemys, gently defensive. "It is natural of course that his father should wish to keep him at home."

"My dear lady, Jack is my only son, and I would not lift a finger to keep him at home against his will," cried the rector stoutly.

Mrs. Kemys smiled faintly. It seemed to her so absurd that the rector could mention his homely plodding son in the same breath as her strong splendid Rodric; and the rector made a faint clacking sound of deprecation as he reflected on the selfishness of Richard Kemys.

Young Rodric was all very well, but what was he fit for except emigration? He had had no University education; he had never distinguished himself at anything but cricket and football; a hot-tempered, wilful boy, who would be all the better for knocking about the world a bit; and if anything happened to him, why there were Courtenay and Corney and little Manuel still left. Whereas *he* was risking his all,

his good steady lad, Jack, who might easily have become a bishop if he had but chosen to take orders.

While Mrs. Kemys smiled, the rector had tears in his eyes; but it was the same emotion of parental pride that produced these contrary results.

"The great thing is that each lad should have his little bit of capital to start with," said the rector. "Money breeds money. I'm handing over his poor mother's money to Jack. It would have to come to him at my death, you know, so what signifies letting him have it a little sooner? And if he loses it, you mustn't think that will be the end of all his hopes," said the old man, suddenly bethinking himself. "No — no — I've got a little bit of my own, you know. Not much, but enough to make sure he will always have plenty of bread and cheese, eh? That will all be tied up, safe and sound, on — on your — on Jack's wife." The poor rector very nearly said, "on your Annie," but he stopped himself in time, with a guilty blush.

Mrs. Kemys started also, and looked keenly at the rector's flushed face. Though circumstances had kept her ignorant of business, she was quick-witted enough on other matters.

She knew what was in the rector's mind just as surely as though he had actually spoken Annie's name aloud, and had some ado to conceal her resentment. But the habit of self-control came to her aid, and after a pause, she spoke quietly.

"Jack is a good boy, and I hope he will find a nice wife some day; but he is too young to think of settling down yet, for a long time."

As this was also the rector's opinion, he could not contradict Mrs. Kemys, but he realised vaguely a new and indefinable want of sympathy in her tone and manner. She spoke for the first time as though Jack were a stranger, an outsider, on a different level.

It was impossible for the rector to suspect anyone so uniformly gentle and humble as Mrs. Kemys of an attempt to patronize Jack; but nevertheless for the second time that morning, poor Mr. Meredydd's happy content with himself and the world in general, was disturbed.

His easily restored composure, however, returned when the young people presently came through the garden, talking and laughing, and laden with prim-roses.

Annie looked a trifle more pensive than usual, as became a maiden who had that morning received and declined her first offer of marriage. Little Manuel clung to her right hand, and Jack walked on her other side.

The rector, looking from her lovely flushed face to Jack's honest freckled countenance, thought with delight that they made a handsome couple; but Mrs. Kemys saw an ordinary looking square-built young man walking beside "*a daughter of the gods, divinely tall, and most divinely fair.*" Annie's mother experienced a most unwonted sensation of indignation

and revolt. She would not have it. Her pretty Annie —

At the bottom of her heart she craved intensely that her child should possess all the good things in life that she had missed. Poverty and anxiety, care and obscurity had been her lot always. They should not be Annie's portion if she could help it.

If she could help it! But alas, how powerless she was. A woman tied hand and foot by convention: entirely dependent upon and subject to, an abnormally selfish and imperious mate; and without a penny of her own in the world.

It was that which rendered her so helpless.

Not a penny in the world of her own.

For the last two and twenty years of her life she had been occupied entirely with child-bearing and child-rearing, and a thousand household cares; working harder than any servant in the house, and entirely and submissively anxious to fail in no possible duty.

She had seen old servants of the former owners of Nantgwilt granted pensions after twenty years service; for Richard's father had been liberal and generous. Even Sharman, the old nurse, took her annual holiday. But neither holiday nor pension fell to the share of her mistress.

Some day, if she outlived her husband, no doubt both the holiday and the pension would be granted to her; but Mrs. Kemys was far too busy a woman not to live in the present, and too industrious to sigh

for leisure. She sighed only for the children's sake.

If she could have had anything of her own, however little. To be able to help the boys, secretly, to some of the innocent pleasures arbitrarily denied them; to buy the extra luxury for the ailing child; the new dress or becoming hat for the pretty, discontented daughter.

Even if her husband would have given her an allowance for the household bills, from which she could have saved — secret aspiration of many a thrifty, anxious housewife who has no reward for economy to look for, when there is no possibility of margin; when all her efforts only amount to the despairing certainty that whatever she has spent, it is too much.

As though the children could be fed and clothed and brought up for nothing, she had thought, during those long years when worry robbed her of her sleep, and stole the colour from her cheeks and the brightness from her eyes, and drew lines of care down her thin face.

Richard Kemys did not worry: when he was anxious or discontented or annoyed, he let people know it, as he would have said himself. His angry voice, his ebullitions of temper, and his threats against his household, were all so many safety valves. When the storm of his indignation had burst he returned to his senses and enjoyed his meals and his sleep, and the contemplation of the figures in his bank books, which occupied so many of his waking hours.

He hated parting with his money, and he grudged

every unnecessary expense, and not a few necessary ones.

He said truly that if he had not done so when he started life, as a younger son, with only his godmother's thousand pounds to fall back on, he would never have made a fortune at all. He had mastered all desire to spend his money then, and now in its turn the love of saving had mastered him.

Like many another husband and father he had no idea of making his wife in any way independent of him, and preferred to inspect every detail of her household and personal expenses, and to dole out to her the exact sums required to defray them.

The items were often so fiercely disputed that the trades-people, no less than Mrs. Kemys herself, dreaded the monthly payday. He was so determined that no one should know his affairs, that he kept two or three separate banking accounts; and at the time of his marriage left the family solicitor, Mr. Turley, who had managed the Nantgwilt estate for years, for a stranger and rival, but recently settled in Llysdinam. His wife knew that his London lawyer, Mr. Toavan, assisted him in collecting the profits from his business, now left almost entirely in the hands of John Bond, his manager and head-clerk; but of what these profits consisted she had not the vaguest idea, yet she had grounds for believing them to be not inconsiderable. It is difficult for a man to be always on guard with his wife, and Mrs. Kemys was observant, if she had learnt to be silent.

She noted the expression on his face sometimes when he had been shut up with the postbag in his study, on certain mornings; and being aware of his ruling passion, knew that the tidings he had received must have gratified it in one form or another. But he never relaxed the rule of economy in the slightest degree.

During the previous summer, on Annie's eighteenth birthday, when his wife, taking her courage in both hands, had proposed that they should give a garden party, Mr. Kemys had flown into a rage which had discomposed his trembling household for many days.

Why should he be expected to entertain the country? A plain country squire, who had not been ashamed to go into business and to work longer hours than any clerk he had ever seen? Every one knew who he was and all about him. There had been a Kemys of Nantgwilt before most of his neighbours had ever been heard of. There was no need for him to spend money to prove his position.

For Annie's sake, Mrs. Kemys had withstood him more firmly than usual. She had even shed tears, though she was a woman not given to the display of emotion. The desire to weep had left her, no less than the desire to laugh. But the tears in Annie's blue eyes had power to move her as no grief of her own would have moved her.

It would cost so little, she had pleaded. There was the garden, the beautiful old china and silver put

away, it was a pity they should never be seen; the fruit in plenty, more than they could use. It meant little more than new dresses for the girls. They must have new dresses now, and then. She herself could manage without — poor Mrs. Kemys swallowed a sigh.

“I daresay, and the next thing would be that you would want to take Annie to other people’s garden parties, driving all over the country, dressing her up and turning her head and killing the horses.”

“Why not? It went to my heart to refuse to take her to Artramont, and yet she had nothing fit to wear. It’s very hard on the girl that she should go nowhere, poor Annie — so pretty as she is, and how is she ever to — to meet any one?”

“So that is all your idea. To get her married. I know what your *meeting any one* means. I can tell you I have no wish to throw my daughter at people’s heads,” thundered Mr. Kemys, with such indignation that his wife really felt as though she had been guilty of unwomanly scheming.

“If any man wishes to marry her, he can come and tell me so. She’s not shut up in prison. Every one knows who she is, and where she is. I’ll not have her taught to squander money on clothes, nor to gad about looking for a husband.”

“Oh, Richard, you know I was far from thinking of anything of the kind.”

“What else do your plans amount to, I should like to know,” he said, and she was silent, conscience-

stricken; yet presently returning bravely to the charge.

"She is past eighteen. She ought to come out. She has a right to expect that we should make a little effort for her. Boys are sent out into the world, or to college,—and girls, who have so much less done for them, who cost so little, poor things,—have only this to look forward to. A few years of youth and prettiness and amusement, just time to look about them, before they settle down for life. Even I had that, Richard."

"How much the better were you for it?" he asked derisively. "Yes, you were taken to London; where I've no doubt you'd take Annie if you could —"

"I would," she cried, with a touch of her old spirit, so long quiescent.

"I thought so," he answered, scornfully. "You would drag her up to town and make a fool of her, because a silly old woman chose to take you up to London when you were a girl. And what good did it do you? You came back to the Red House, where you'd lived all your life, and were glad enough to marry the man at whose doors you'd been brought up."

A bright pink colour glowed in Annette's white face.

"I had — other chances, Richard," she said.

"But you preferred the man you'd known all your life," he said, with that triumphant, angry laugh

which always jarred upon his wife, and to which she was obliged to listen so often.

She shuddered, yet, womanlike, was quick to try and turn to her purpose the rare allusion to that past when he had loved her after his own fashion, or at least, desired her with all the force and passion of which his masterful and egotistical nature was capable.

She laid a thin hand, worn in his service, upon his arm.

"And if I *did* prefer you, Richard," she said, in a low tone, "it was because you — fell in love with me, wasn't it?"

"What's the good of asking questions like that now?" he said impatiently.

"Because I want Annie to have her chance," she said. "You wouldn't have looked at me, Richard, if I'd never been outside Llanon,—if I'd been dressed as poor Annie is now —"

"That's just like a woman. What have clothes got to do with it? When a man is fool enough to get married he doesn't choose a girl for her clothes."

She avoided argument. "It makes all the difference to the girl to be badly dressed. It makes her unhappy and discontented — even if she is the sweetest girl on earth. And surely if we can afford it —" she urged.

"Who says we can afford it?" he said angrily. "Understand once for all, I won't be told I can afford this or that. Annie lives in a very different

home from the Red House, and is surrounded by every comfort. If she's discontented or ungrateful, send her to me, that's all. Don't let me hear another word on that subject."

The purport of this conversation returned to the memory of Mrs. Kemys when she looked at Annie walking beside Jack Meredydd, and thought despairingly — what could she do for her child?

Mr. Meredydd and Jack went off together immediately to lay the particulars of the Argentine scheme before Mr. Kemys in his study; Sophy took the little boys up to the nursery to be made ready for luncheon, and Mrs. Kemys went slowly into the house and up the shallow creaking stairs of oak, into her long low-ceiled bedroom on the first floor; whither Annie followed her, and stood beside the dressing-table playing absently with the old-fashioned Dresden toilet set.

"Mamma, what does Papa say about Rodric? Jack has told us all about it. Will Papa give him the money to go? Jack thought he would because Roddy has come of age, but I don't believe that will make any difference, will it?"

"My dear, how can I tell? Papa will do what he thinks best," said Mrs. Kemys, sighing.

"You might be frank with me, Mamma," said Annie, impatiently. "I'm not a child now. I am sure a girl of eighteen — nearly nineteen, is older than a boy of one and twenty any day."

"That is true," Mrs. Kemys acknowledged. "You are grown-up, darling, though it is so hard to believe it. Sometimes I wish you could all have remained little for ever. Life would have been so much simpler."

"Oh, Mamma, what *is* the use of talking such nonsense," Annie asked, with the despair of one who asks for facts, and is obliged to listen to sentiment altogether beside the point. "You might be thankful we *have* grown up, and can stand up for ourselves a little. And Roddy will; for if Papa won't help him to go to the Argentine, he'll certainly go all the same, only he'll be obliged to borrow the money."

"Surely he would never do that," said Mrs. Kemys in horror, "and who would lend it to him?"

"I suppose he could do what other eldest sons do, and go to the Jews," said Annie, calmly. "One reads of boys doing such things, selling their reversion, or whatever they call it. And though Papa wouldn't have any rejoicings for Roddy's coming of age, or do anything that ordinary fathers do, it doesn't alter the fact that Roddy is the eldest son, and that Nantgwilt must be his one day."

Mrs. Kemys shook her head.

"I don't think poor Roddy could borrow anything on the strength of that. The entail ended with your grandfather — it wasn't renewed. And if Papa chose to leave the property away from Rodric he could do it."

"He would never do anything so wicked," said Annie, vehemently. "Nantgwilt has been handed down from father to son for generations, and which of the others would take it while Rodric was alive?"

"Oh, my dear, I don't know. One never can tell what anyone will do where property is concerned," said Mrs. Kemys in her sad lifeless tones. "I hope Roddy won't defy Papa."

But she knew that Rodric would go, and Annie was aware that she knew.

"It will end in Jack Meredydd lending him the money," she said, hastily turning away from the looking glass, which reflected the deepening colour on her tell-tale face.

"Did Jack say anything about it?" said Mrs. Kemys, quickly.

"Yes, no — he said somebody would lend it. Of course he meant himself. He's got something to lend now, and — and you know how fond he is of — of Roddy." Annie faltered, and meeting her mother's eyes, turned away petulantly.

"Annie — dearest — you wouldn't hide anything from *me*," said Mrs. Kemys, entreatingly.

She came and put her arms about that soft, beautiful figure, and drew the bright head on to her shoulder. "Annie, darling."

"There's nothing to tell," Annie said, but she suffered her mother's embrace less impatiently than usual. "He wanted me to — to wait till he came back."

"You've not engaged yourself to him?"

"No, I said I couldn't. I've promised nothing. I said he might — I suppose it amounted to saying he might try again when he came back — if —"

"If you found no one you liked better meanwhile?"

"I suppose that's what I meant. I said something like that," faltered Annie.

"You don't care for him, then?"

"Not in that way — Oh, Mother, how could I? Jack Meredydd; it would take all the romance out of everything."

"Thank God," said Mrs. Kemys.

Annie was surprised at the unusual vehemence of her mother's tone.

"I don't know why you should thank God," she said, dejectedly. "Very likely I've done a foolish thing. It would be better to marry Jack Meredydd, I suppose, than to stick on here for ever, Sophy and me; growing like the two Miss Byewaters, and Papa rowing us from morning till night."

"Oh, Annie, it won't be always like this. A way will be found. You're only eighteen and a half. Wait a little," said poor Mrs. Kemys.

"It's all very well to say a way will be found. What way?" said Annie. "I know you'd do anything you could, Mamma. It's not your fault. At least, not altogether."

"Not altogether my fault!" said Mrs. Kemys. She uttered an astonished sound between laughing

and crying. "Why, what more could I do, Annie?"

Annie looked at her, half frightened at her own daring, impatient and pitying at the same time.

"Oh, Mamma, if—if only you had the courage—" she said, hardly above her breath. "Often and often have we all said it, the boys and Sophy and I, though we know very well how hard it is for you—but if only you had had the courage to hold your own against Papa—how much, much better it would have been for us all."

CHAPTER IV

THE GRANDMOTHER IN THE COTTAGE

THE midday meal at Nantgwilt was only distinguished by conviviality when the master of the house was absent.

On this particular day it was even gloomier than usual.

Annie and Sophy were secretly resentful of their parent's want of hospitality, since his audible dismissal of the rector and his son on the plea that the luncheon bell was ringing had reached their horrified ears.

Mr. Meredydd was accustomed to the squire's ways, and would not have stayed had he been invited to remain instead of pressed to depart; but Annie and Sophy exchanged glances of dismay none the less, as they paused on the staircase landing, out of sight of the vestibule where Mr. Kemys was speeding his parting guests.

"He might have *asked* them," Sophy whispered indignantly. "Considering they came here only on Rodric's business."

"There is plenty of mutton in the house. Papa knows that well enough, since old Pugh killed a sheep

last Thursday," said Annie, "but I suppose he grudges them even mutton."

"One comfort is they will get a much better luncheon at home," said Sophy viciously. "They are laughing. Listen. Papa can't be so very cross. He is telling them a funny story!"

"Which?" said Annie, with unconscious satire.

The dining-room was dimly lighted by four low windows with heavily leaded casements, framed in Virginia creeper and climbing roses.

The portraits of the Kemys family which hung upon the oak panels were black with age, and the gilt frames tarnished.

The heavy carving of the oak ceiling, though exquisite in itself, did not add to the brightness of the room; and the prevailing gloom was reflected upon the owner's face as he took his seat at the head of the long table and uttered a short, angry grace.

The primroses had been hastily arranged in thin battered bowls of Jacobean silver.

The plate at Nantgwilt was plentiful and valuable, and numerous precautions were taken to safeguard it. The heavily embossed silver dishes, the weighty Georgian candlesticks, the massive salvers, jugs and drinking cups that ornamented table and sideboard, were familiar objects in the eyes of the Kemys children, and they would gladly have exchanged them all for pewter, if they could have been assured of a greater variety and abundance in their

daily fare. For meals in the Manor House were governed by the parsimony of the master, and boys and girls alike revolted against perpetual mutton and rice pudding.

Richard Kemys cared little what he ate or drank, and often talked of selling the wine wherewith his father had re-stocked the cellars: but as he had been advised that the greater part of it would become more valuable still, he deferred the proposed sale.

He attributed the excellent health he had always enjoyed to his sparseness of diet, and held the theory that all modern men and women ate and drank more than was good for them. Mr. Kemys grew stout notwithstanding his general abstemiousness, but his growing boys and girls resented the application of the theory to themselves, and the village cried shame upon their squire, because his children were known to spend their pocket-money on biscuits, though Mr. Kemys remained equally unaware of this fact, and of the comments it aroused.

He carved the mutton in a silence unbroken, and the old man-servant handed it round, while Mrs. Kemys ladled out the potatoes and the cauliflower.

The little boys in their blue jerseys sat still as mice; their awestruck faces every now and then disappearing into the silver tankards which held their measured allowance of milk, and re-emerging, flushed with the double exertion of lifting the mugs and imbibing the contents.

Annie and Sophy, as determined to save appear-

ances as girls of their age usually are, made *sotto voce* remarks across the table to each other, or to their mother, at intervals, and surreptitiously fed the spaniel, who lurked discreetly beneath the table out of reach of his master's foot.

The appearance of a rhubarb tart evolved unwary exclamations of pleasure from Corney and Manuel, but their faces fell when their father remarked that it was too sweet to need any sugar, and sent a message of reproof to the cook.

Their wry faces over the rhubarb provoked a sharp lecture, which culminated in dismissal, upon Manuel's infantile attempt to soften the acidity by pouring a little milk into his plate, which not unnaturally resulted in the upsetting of the heavy tankard.

The culprit was led from the dining-room in tears, by his brother, who prudently administered no consolation until he was safely out of his father's hearing.

This incident and the outburst of parental wrath it produced appeared to relieve the settled gloom of Mr. Kemys.

He delivered a short soliloquy over his cheese and single glass of port-wine, upon the want of common intelligence displayed by his recent visitors during their attempt to enlist his sympathy for the would-be emigrants, and he became almost cheerful over the recollection of their failure.

"Of course to me the whole thing is evident

enough," he said contemptuously. "Old Meredydd's brother has an eye on a ranch next his own out there, and doesn't know how to get hold of it, so he inspires his fool of a nephew with a plan for collecting sufficient capital to buy it, and bring out a lot of young idiots to work it under his benevolent supervision. Jack had the impudence to tell me that Rodric was the only one of the precious gang who had expectations. I'll show him what Rodric's expectations are worth. It's a plot to get money out of *me*, neither more nor less. Well, I made it pretty plain to them that if Rodric joined their fine syndicate he'd not get a brass farthing from me now, nor hereafter. He'll get his present allowance cut off, and that will be the beginning and the end of it all, so far as I am concerned."

His wife and daughters sat still, listening to this tirade with downcast eyes. It was quicker in the end, they had often told each other, not to interrupt Papa. A scornful or indignant mien sometimes roused him to redoubled wrath or eloquence; and long practice had enabled them to banish expression from their faces, and to listen without a sign of dissent.

"I'll take one of you girls into Llysdinam with me in the dogcart, if you like," said Mr. Kemys, when he was at last convinced that he had made his intentions as regarded Rodric sufficiently clear. "I'm going to see Machon on business, and if one of you comes, there'll be no need to take Thomas

away from his work to hold the horse outside the office,"

"I'll come," said Annie, at once interpreting and replying to the look of entreaty on her mother's face.

"Mind you don't put on a flyaway hat or any nonsense of that kind," said her father gruffly, but his brow cleared slightly at the readiness of her acceptance.

As soon as he had departed to the study, the ladies shut themselves safely into the drawing-room and the reason for Annie's alacrity was made manifest.

"We want to finish our white gowns, Mamma, and I *must* get some embroidery cotton. Sophy has a lovely pattern."

"My dear, I can give you no more money, and you know Papa does not like you to do commissions when you're out with him."

"Don't worry yourself, mother dear. He's always ages and ages in Mr. Machon's office, and I shall persuade someone to hold the horse and get my commissions done in a moment. He will be none the wiser. I rather like playing him a little trick," said Annie coaxingly; "and as for money, Sophy and I have found a way to raise a little."

"Annie! You said it should be private," said Sophy warningly.

"I don't mind Mamma, she won't give us away."

"But she might forbid us."

"She won't."

"Children, I hope you are doing nothing wrong," said Mrs. Kemys with anxious looks.

"There's nothing wrong. The things were our own," said Annie fearlessly. "We saw an advertisement about old jewelry being bought and we sent our coral necklaces and got seven shillings each for them, and we're going to send some more of our things."

"My dears! Those pretty old corals mounted in gold, they were worth far more than that," said Mrs. Kemys in dismay.

"They weren't worth more than that to *us*," said Sophy. "Our new frocks are worth more to us than sets of baby corals. White cotton frocks would be just nothing without embroidery. I am sure we shall have to work hard enough as it is."

"Mother, think how we need new frocks," said Annie reproachfully.

Mrs. Kemys could not deny their need. She looked round at the Buhl cabinets ranged against the panel of the drawing-room. Cabinets and contents were worth a small fortune. The price of a single article of *vertu* among the many which surrounded her would have eased her daily burden.

There was a Vandyck portrait of the most important of the past owners of Nantgwilt, one Cornelius Kemys, the son of a Dutch heiress, and himself known as the Miser, since he had bought all his neighbour's lands and added them to the estate which had formerly been but small and insignificant. This

picture was known to be worth several thousand pounds. It hung above a mantel carved by Grinling Gibbons. A Venetian chandelier of the rarest kind was suspended from the painted ceiling; and a connoisseur was said to have offered its weight in gold for the collection of old Nankin china.

Mr. Kemys might have been tempted to sell the family treasures had he not been firmly persuaded that every year of waiting would increase their value in the market.

But of what avail were such buried riches to the daughters of the old house, who were forced to part with their personal ornaments to buy themselves clothes; or to the son and heir, who would be driven to borrow money for his own start in life.

"Oh children, do as you like. I haven't the heart to scold you," said Mrs. Kemys, "even if I had the right —"

"The right! Of course you have the right," said Annie, putting a protecting arm about the slender bent form. "Poor old Mummie, if only you knew how to scold, which thank Heaven, you don't."

"No, no. I haven't the right," she said, kissing softly yet passionately, the fresh velvet cheek that was pressed against her thin face. "Because I — I did the same thing long ago with my own poor little trinkets, the things I had as a girl, which should have been yours: But they were worth so little it didn't much matter — except that I am afraid it would have pained my poor father to think I could

part with them. I — I — sold them all when Rodric and Courtenay went to school," said Mrs. Kemys.

Old Mrs. Kemys sat at the open window of her cottage, enjoying the pleasant breath of the spring, and watching the movements of her odd man, who was working in the little garden below. The sitting-room was on the first floor, plainly and even scantily furnished, contrasting strangely with the wealth of garniture in the rooms of the Manor House.

But old Mrs. Kemys did not care for furniture except in so far as it administered to her personal comfort. Her armchair, if modern and ugly, was luxurious, and a heavy screen — ornamented by scraps from illustrated papers cut out and pasted on by her own hands — protected her from any possible draught. On a low table convenient to her hand lay her knitting, her spectacle-case and her *Daily Mail*.

She was a handsome old lady, well-featured like her son, and with the same fiery dark blue eyes and ruddy complexion, but the abundant white hair parted on her forehead softened the harshness of the clear-cut face.

She wore a white cap tied beneath her chin, and a small white shawl crossed over her bent shoulders, upon the well worn black silk gown.

She was seventy years old and the very frankness of her acceptance of the rôle of grandmother lent her a dignity and a picturesqueness which no straining after an appearance of youth or fashion could have

produced; the restfulness of her attitude gave a sense of repose.

Here was a woman conscious that she had ended her life's work, that she had fulfilled her duty by her race and her country in her own generation. She had suffered and borne children, and brought them up to the best of her ability, and worked for them strenuously through the burden and heat of the day. Now, in the evening of life, she was entitled to enjoy the little space of leisure that might be granted to her before she was called away altogether from the scene of her past labours.

And she did enjoy it, even though she was partially crippled with rheumatism; her cheerfulness was unimpaired, and the interest she took in her surroundings appeared rather to increase than diminish with years.

She regarded her daughter-in-law much as the village in general regarded their squire's wife, with a mixture of liking and pity; and the younger Mrs. Kemys was instinctively aware of the exact measure of her mother-in-law's regard.

But she was also aware that the old lady was loyal to her in her own fashion, upheld her whenever she could, and was more dependent upon her daily visits for amusement than she herself altogether realised.

There was an odd confidence between them, born of mutual respect for a sincerity common to both. Old Mrs. Kemys was troubled by no illusions with regard to her son, and it was this fact which further

simplified her intercourse with her daughter-in-law.

"You're later than usual," she said, lifting her face for the formal kiss of greeting.

"I waited to see Annie off with her father. He has driven her in to Llysdyham," said Annette. "Sharman has taken her work into the garden to watch over the little boys, and Sophy is busy in the schoolroom. She is really very clever with her needle, poor child."

Mrs. Kemys sank into her low chair with a weariness that did not escape the old lady's keen glance.

"Anything wrong?" she said, sympathetically.

"Yes, dear Granny, or it seems so," said Annette, despondently. She made a faint effort to laugh. "Perhaps it is Annie who is right: it would have been better for them all if I had had the courage to — to stand up to him — long ago," she said.

"I have always told you so," said Mrs. Kemys, "though Annie had no business to say anything of the kind, but children say what they like nowadays. What has happened, my dear?"

Mrs. Kemys drew Rodric's letter from her pocket and handed it across in silence; and his grandmother, putting on her glasses with hands that trembled a little, read it through.

"He has asked his father for a thousand pounds —"

They looked at each other hopelessly.

"I always knew the boy would never be content in that office," said old Mrs. Kemys, querulously.

"If you had been firmer — if you had insisted on his being allowed his way about the army —"

"I wish I had," said Annette. It was almost a relief to both that she should take this pretense of blame upon herself. "I'm afraid he will go, Granny."

"Of course he will go; and what is more he is just the kind of boy who would do well for himself, if his father would but see it," said old Mrs. Kemys. "Strong as an ox; persevering and steady, with a spirit nothing can dash."

"That's just it — I dread what is bound to come, — what has been coming all these years. He has just been waiting — that is like my poor boy — till he came of age — to have it out with his father. And Richard will cut him off, as he threatens."

"He would never do that. He may fight with Roddy, but he must respect him; and he would never make Courtenay his heir, he looks down upon him as a bookworm too much," said Mrs. Kemys, as though trying to re-assure herself and her daughter-in-law.

"Not Courtenay, but little Corney — he talks of —" said Annette, with her wan smile; "the little fellow who's hardly had time yet to offend him — who's too young to defy him or to understand."

"Rodric had better go, if he must go, without seeing his father again," said Mrs. Kemys energetically.

"How can he go without the money?" Annette scanned the old lady's face wistfully. She thought that she saw signs of agitation — of indecision in

her mother-in-law's expression — and a trembling hope came into her own.

"If there were anything you could do, dear Granny," she faltered. "Oh I know, I know you have very little, and I have never, never asked you before, though indeed you have been so good to the children there has been no need."

"Good to the children! They are my own flesh and blood," said the old lady sharply: then her voice broke. "Do you think I would wait to be asked?" she said querulously. "What is that you are holding out to me? It's so small I can't see it."

It was the corner of Rodric's letter that his mother held up mutely. She fitted it into the torn page, and Rodric's grandmother read it, and trembled more than ever.

"The boy takes it as a matter of course, you see," she said, holding her handsome old chin high. "He knows me better than you do, Annette, God bless him."

Then she wrung her hands piteously.

"I can do nothing, Annette, nothing. I handed over my little capital to Richard years ago. He persuaded me that he could do much better with it than old Turley; and I'll not deny he gives me better interest than I got before. I couldn't lay my hand on fifty pounds, my dear, without going to Richard."

"Then it is hopeless," said Annette, and her head dropped on her breast.

"Of course I could get it back. I could insist

on getting it back. Turley would see to that. But you know better than I what the result would be. There would be an open rupture. I have never got on with Richard, but I've steered clear of that, Annette."

"It's not to be thought of."

"I've thought of it many a time," said the old lady, stoutly. "I'd risk it if there were anything definite to be gained. But to get a thousand pounds that way, would do the boy more harm than good," she faltered. "It's not that I mind being pinched for money my dear, but — but none of you would ever be allowed to come near me again," she said piteously.

"Dear Granny, say no more about it," said Annette, wearily. "Of course it is of no use if it cannot be done without Richard's knowledge. Roddy must try elsewhere." She did not attempt to disguise the resentfulness of her tone as she added: "It seems Jack Meredydd is willing to lend it to him."

"Jack Meredydd! What has he got to do with it? He has no money," said Mrs. Kemys sharply.

"His father has transferred his mother's little fortune to him."

"His mother's fiddlestick. Who was his mother? The daughter of old Lord Yorath's agent. She hadn't a thousand pounds in the world, or if she had, it was the very outside."

"Old Meredydd will give him whatever he has to

give," she spoke with unwonted bitterness. "I would rather be under an obligation to almost anyone than to Jack Meredydd."

She added no explanation, but none was needed. Old Mrs. Kemys knew and shared her fears and ambitions for Annie.

"It would give the lad — a kind of claim," she said with a groan, "and the child has so little to distract her."

"To think one has no voice — no voice at all — in a matter where one can see so clearly," said Annette. "It is not only that he's no match for Annie —"

"He's not in a position to keep a wife at all," said the old lady, indignantly.

"But, also — that though he's a good boy, he's — ordinary. He's no mate for her. She could rise to anything. She's so pretty and gracious, with the right word for everyone, and bright as sunshine always. Oh how badly they manage these things in England. If we lived in France I suppose there would be nothing to prevent my going over — to Artramont for instance, now that the Yoraths have come back to live there at last — and saying to Lady Yorath — 'If you're looking for a suitable wife for your son, as of course you are, — *I'm* looking for a suitable husband for my daughter.'"

"No doubt she would welcome the suggestion," said Mrs. Kemys satirically.

"She would if she were wise. Annie has beauty

and health and brains, and a heart in a thousand. She's fit to be a princess, and her family is as old as any in the kingdom. Very different from the Yoraths, if it comes to that."

"Old Yorath was carrying a miner's pick over his shoulder when Cornelius Kemys was the biggest landowner in the country," said old Mrs. Kemys with satisfaction; for the richer and greater the Yoraths became, the more persistently and joyfully did their neighbours recall their humble origin. "For my part, there are plenty of young men whom I should regard as more suitable than Lord Yorath; in spite of his greatness. I always think badly of a man in his position who has come to thirty without finding a wife."

"Perhaps he has been too particular," said Annette smiling. "I've heard he is very shy. I only thought of him because he is the most eligible of all, and because I have never heard anything against him, and because they say his mother is so anxious to cure him of his wanderings after big game in Africa and America, and to get him to settle down."

"It's time he settled down. He is a stranger in his own county. Artramont has been let for five and twenty years."

"That was not his fault. It was let when he was a child because his mother could not bear to live there after his father died; and they say he was too good-hearted to turn out his tenants — the poor old Milwids — who lived there so long and wanted to be

allowed to die there. That is one of the things I heard which made me think of Lord Yorath. I wish he could meet Annie however it came about. She would be just the wife for a man in his position. It's not only because she's my child that I think so. I shouldn't wish it for Sophy."

"You forget that in France it is a question of *dot*. Where is Annie's fortune to come from?"

"Everything seems to resolve itself into a question of pounds, shillings and pence," said Annette, bitterly.

"I wonder if Mr. Turley would lend Roddy the money," said old Mrs. Kemys, suddenly. "He and his father have been the family solicitors for generations; and he was fond of your own father, Annette, for that matter."

"How can we ask him? He is very bitter against Richard, and no wonder; all the business taken from him and given to Machon, a stranger in Llysdinam. I am ashamed to face him, though I have never cut him as Richard bade me. He was, as you say, my father's friend. But I could not ask him a favour."

"I could — for we are cronies, as you know; though I do not say I should care to do it. Still — he might lend it out of his very bitterness against Richard," said the old lady, with a chuckle like her son's.

"Roddy wouldn't take it from him. He would prefer to borrow from Jack Meredydd, who is his own friend. And I don't feel sure of Mr. Turley's

being willing to do it. 'Atter all, a man of business is not usually willing to lend any one a thousand pounds in a hurry — who can offer no security," said Annette, shaking her head.

"It is true that Richard would find it out if he did; and that you would have to bear the brunt," said the old lady.

"Oh! *me!*" said Annette, with a gesture almost scornful.

The light from the window fell upon her worn delicate, colourless face, and the look she turned upon her mother-in-law was one of pathetic, reproachful wonder; as who should say: *Is there anything left for me to suffer? Have I not lived over twenty years with this man who is your son?*

Richard's mother answered her look rather than the words she had spoken.

"I bore three sons," she said in broken tones. "Two as good and kind and gentle as men could be, and both were snatched from me in their youth. One died for his country and the other in his bed of a common cold that no one could have dreamt would turn into an illness and kill a strong man. And only Richard was left. The youngest. That never was like the others; that I never could do anything with. God knows I brought him up no differently, except so far as his frowardness often made kindness impossible. But I've always said training has very little to do with character. Pick up a couple of new-

born kittens, and one will struggle and bite and scratch, and another lie contented in your hand. Richard was born with the drop of bad blood in him, though where he got it from is more than mortal man can tell. Thank God, it's not come out in any of his children so far as I can see."

"A man must have the defects of his qualities, I suppose," said Annette, wearily.

"What are his qualities?"

"You are his mother and do not need to ask. When I married him I saw his strength — his courage — his strong will — Look how he went forth from his father's home, a boy almost — and fought with fortune and conquered her — unaided."

"Did he conquer her? A fine use he has made of his money, with his children in rags — the laughing stock of the place. But you would make excuses for him if he killed you in one of his rages, that grow upon him till I sometimes fear for his reason."

"Richard is sane enough," said his wife.

"No man is sane who lets his temper get the better of him. What are you looking at? Why are your eyes wandering so?"

"I thought I heard voices in the garden," said Annette uneasily.

"Why should there not be voices in the garden?"

"It is Pryse. I hope there is nothing wrong," said Annette, rising.

"What should be wrong except your nerves? Of

course it's a caller. Why couldn't Pryse tell whoever it is to come on here and be done with it?" said Mrs. Kemys, testily.

But old Pryse, catching sight of his lady's face at the open window, made her, without more ado, imperative signs to come down.

"Oh ma'am, come home. You're wanted at once," he said in urgent tones. "There's been an accident."

CHAPTER V

THE BOLT FROM THE BLUE

THE dog-cart descended the steep winding lanes from Llanon to the high road in the valley, and then sped rapidly along, beside the river, now brown and swollen with recent rains.

The stone-tiled roofs of the wayside cottages glistened in the April sunshine, among the leafless trees; in the orchards the earth was blue with violets, as the peartrees were white with blossom. Yellow daffodils nodded among sheaves of pointed green spears; the springs were overflowing; the birds sang loudly.

It was the moment of gladness, of hope, of assurance that the yearly fulfilment of promise was at hand, and that spring had but paused, tantalizing, to take breath before pouring forth gifts in abundance to bless the waiting earth. Annie sat beside her father, pleasantly occupied with thoughts of her commissions, and cheered by the secret consciousness of riches. She gave only half her attention to the parental monologue which Mr. Kemys mistook for conversation with his daughter. But her comments were always dutifully produced at the right points and he neither expected nor desired more.

He was even secretly flattered at the warmth of the greetings bestowed upon his pretty daughter by the few foot passengers they encountered on their way; which were so unlike the sullen salutes and furtive nods of unwilling recognition accorded to himself by his tenants and neighbours.

But the lads and lasses among whom she had grown up all had a smile or a blush for Annie; and the older folk returned her pretty smile with those kindly glances of affection and admiration which beauty can so readily evoke at will.

"Nonsense about the girl being discontented," he thought to himself. "She's as bright as a button. Better company than all the rest of them put together."

He flicked at the chestnut mare triumphantly, and she responded with a start and a flourish of heels which threatened to upset the dog-cart. The satisfaction on her master's face died out.

"Thomas gives her too much corn. I've told him about it before," he said angrily.

"But she's gone splendidly so far," said Annie, anxious to restore his good spirits. "It's only playfulness, Papa. She hasn't a bit of vice in her, and you manage her better than anyone else. Generally she jigs and dances about so that poor Mamma gets quite nervous."

"I've never seen a horse yet that I couldn't handle," he said, setting his handsome lips grimly. "She knows she has to go my pace and not her own."

I make her go steady whether she likes it or not. She'll be in Llysddinam in half an hour and without overheating herself either."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when an upset happened, and so suddenly that none of those concerned in it ever quite agreed upon the exact details of its occurrence.

The hills sloping down to the river side here and there jutted out, causing the road at their base to curve abruptly; round the sharpest of these blind turns the mare came full upon a motor car, buzzing merrily along, and hooting as it came. There was no collision, for the driver of the car pulled up with a jerk that threw its occupants backwards; but the mare reared and bolted, dashing the dog-cart against a tree. Richard Kemys and his daughter were flung heavily into the road.

The driver of the car, who was also its owner, leapt from his place, and leaving his chauffeur and a passing cyclist to grapple with the mare, now kicking wildly in a mad effort to disentangle herself from the wreckage of dog-cart and harness—he ran to the assistance of Annie, who lay motionless where she had fallen.

Mr. Kemys had already staggered to his feet. He put his hand to his head for a moment and looked round dizzily. Then he caught sight of the broken dog-cart, the struggling mare, and the prostrate figure of his daughter; his ungovernable temper burst forth; a torrent of abuse fell from his lips; he

consigned the motor car and its possessor to perdition in a fury akin to madness. For he had been badly frightened, and like many quick-tempered persons, when he was frightened he was angry.

The mare, trembling violently, was soothed to comparative calm by the united efforts of the chauffeur and the cyclist; and the latter, leaving her to the other's care, joined the little group by the roadside.

The young man who had come to Annie's assistance had lifted her like a child, and carried her to the bank, where he knelt, supporting her head, from which the hat had fallen, displaying her bright hair and colourless face.

"Let me help you," said the cyclist. "I'm a doctor. At least, I'm a medical student, which is the next best thing."

He was a stalwart stripling, though half a head shorter than the other man, who was obviously his senior by half a dozen years. His sallow face was good-natured, but his manner was rough and unpolished.

His handling of the unconscious girl, however skilful, was too ungentle to please the owner of the motor, who frowned and flushed and bit his lip as Annie moaned.

"Her arm is broken. I can't be sure of anything else. Probably concussion. Look here, get me a stick and I'll put her arm roughly into splints. Then

we'll lift her into the car and take her to the nearest hospital."

Richard Kemys forbade either proceeding in a voice of thunder.

"Leave my daughter alone," he shouted. "I'll not have her touched, and I'll see you both d—d before she sets foot in that infernal machine, d—you."

At the sound of those familiar furious tones, poor Annie stirred uneasily, and half opened her eyes.

The motorist looked Mr. Kemys full in the face. He was a clean-shaven man of about thirty, hawk-nosed, and rather thin-lipped, with fine well-opened eyes of greenish hazel under arched black brows. He put up his hand with an authoritative gesture.

"Stop that please," he said coldly. "The young lady is coming to herself."

"What the — is that to you?" said Mr. Kemys, at once astounded and angry.

"It is this to me," said the younger man haughtily. "I won't suffer such language to be used in the presence of any woman, and if she's really your daughter you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

The anger of Richard Kemys threatened to choke him. He was unused to defiance.

His size and strength, no less than his known ungovernable temper, had caused not only his inferiors but those few of his equals with whom he held converse to avoid giving him provocation.

But the man who faced him now was obviously possessed of a spirit equal to his own. Incidentally he was possessed besides of a fine athletic person, and was a score of years younger than his antagonist. There was also something of the bull-dog expression on the face of the sturdy cyclist, whose small grey eyes twinkled gleefully as at the prospect of battle, and who was obviously ranged on the side of the motorist.

Mr. Kemys looked from one to the other, and their unconcealed contempt of his wrath lashed him to fury. He fell back on threats.

"If she's injured I'll make you pay for it. These road hogs are the curse of the country. I'll make you rue the day you came round that corner upon me like that. I'm a magistrate. Everyone knows Kemys of Nantgwilt; I don't know who *you* are and I don't care, but I'll get your name and address out of you."

"I'm Lord Yorath," said the motorist; "and it's not the moment now to discuss the cause of the accident. Your daughter's badly hurt, I fear, and I don't think you're in a fit state to decide what ought to be done with her, so I shall act on my own responsibility, and take her to the cottage hospital at Llysddinam, where she can be attended to at once. Then I'll come back and hear anything you want to say."

"I'll follow you, and bear witness that the acci-

dent was no more your fault than it was mine, Lord Yorath," said the cyclist cheerfully. "You weren't going fast, and you certainly sounded your hooter. Let me help you carry the girl to your car."

"I'm much obliged to you," said the motorist, rather shortly. "Perhaps you'll kindly see the young lady's arm doesn't get hurt as I lift her."

Richard Kemys made one step forward and stopped as though he had been shot. A sudden dart of agonizing pain bereft him of all power of movement. His face became livid, his limbs rigid; his brow wet with anguish.

He did not exactly lose consciousness, but he was conscious of nothing save the intensity of his suffering. A dreadful sensation of impending suffocation beset him. . . .

"You're better now," someone said, in not unkindly tones.

He was sitting by the roadside, and the young cyclist was supporting him, and administering brandy to him from a pocket flask.

The mare, tethered to an adjacent post, was cropping the grass as quietly as though nothing had happened.

The cyclist, holding the wrist of Richard Kemys between his thumb and two fingers, looked into his face attentively.

"I expect you've felt something like this before, haven't you?" he said. There was no respect for

Kemys of Nantgwilt in his tone, but a decided rough compassion, which was recognised by the older man rather uneasily.

"I've never felt anything the least like it before," he said, almost angrily, though he was still too much under the influence of the terrible sensation he had experienced to reply with his usual vigour.

"Well, look here then — I think it would be only kindness to tell you what's the matter with you," said the cyclist in the same easy and familiar, but not unsympathetic manner: not the manner of the visiting physician to his patients, but of the kindly house surgeon to the hospital inmates. "You've got a beast of a temper, haven't you — and it's as well you should know that every time you give way to it, you're just knocking another nail into your coffin,— to put it bluntly. Look here, you felt something like *this*, didn't you?"

He described Mr. Kemys's recent sensations with a terse accuracy that silenced retort.

"I thought so," said the cyclist, as the elder man, with white lips, nodded assent.

"What is it?" he asked, hoarsely.

"Angina pectoris."

Richard Kemys stared with unseeing eyes at his grazing mare, and at the distant blue hills against which her familiar form was silhouetted. The blunt words of the shrewd ordinary-looking young man beside him carried a horrible conviction in their very absence of any attempt to soften the truth.

The medical student had the calm courage of his convictions which is so characteristic of youth.

"How long —?" said Mr. Kemys. His own voice sounded strange to him, but it was quite steady.

"Impossible to say. I should think it depended partly on yourself. I can tell you anyway that as long as you live you must be absolutely quiet in mind and body as far as possible. You must never allow yourself to indulge in any emotion you can possibly help, least of all anger. But of course you'll take the best advice. You mustn't hang upon *my* words like that. I'm not qualified to give my opinion at all, you know." He looked almost amused in the midst of his sympathy. "I can give you the names of the best heart specialists in London, if you like; though, mind you, it doesn't follow you've got disease of the heart — there may be nothing — or they may find no signs. It's not always to be diagnosed by examination — but when I saw you just now — why —" his pause was eloquent.

"I don't believe in doctors," said Richard Kemys sternly.

The cyclist shrugged his shoulders.

"What are the remedies?" said Mr. Kemys.

"I'm not going to prescribe for you. I'm only in my second year," said the student, looking amused once more. "There are certain drugs which are always used in these cases. You'll find them in any book of household medicine if you're bent on taking the doctors' daily bread out of their mouths. You

ought to carry one of the remedies always in your pocket."

"Do you mean — I shall have it again?" said Mr. Kemys.

The cyclist did not answer in words, but he nodded; and looked as he felt, rather sorry for his questioner.

The next words Mr. Kemys uttered surprised him.

"You've earned your fee, and I'll give it to you on one condition."

"I told you I wasn't qualified to give medical advice," said the cyclist, flushing. "I recognised your attack — and in common humanity warned you what it was because, frankly, you'd just given me proof that you're in the habit of flying into violent passions, which is about the worst thing you can do. I'm not going to take a fee for that, as you may suppose. But I *do* tell you that if you're not a fool, you'll go and get the best advice in your power without delay."

"You've told me what the matter is," said Mr. Kemys, ignoring this, "and all I want you to do now is to promise to tell nobody else."

"Whom should I tell?"

"That conceited jackanapes whose car caused this — this accident," said Mr. Kemys, gulping down a fresh access of wrath. "Didn't he say he was coming back?"

"He did, but I haven't the slightest desire to tell him, and I don't suppose it would interest him if I

did," said the student brusquely. "It's no business of mine, nor of his. I'm not likely to see him again."

"Do you belong to these parts?" asked Mr. Kemys suspiciously.

"No, I don't. I'm down here, if you must know, cycling around trying to get fit. I had a bad breakdown and have been ordered to give up work for six months, and live out of doors. Don't look like it, do I? But neither do you look like a man who's got anything the matter with him."

"You'll hold your tongue?" said Richard Kemys, ignoring as usual everything irrelative to his own interests.

"Of course I'll hold my tongue. Look here, are you going to let Lord Yorath take you to the hospital and see how your girl's getting on? You don't seem to concern yourself much about her. Don't get angry, but make up your mind what you're going to do quietly, and do it."

"If I'm not to get angry," said Richard, with lowering brow, "that fellow and his damned tin kettle had better keep out of my way. I'll not go to the hospital. What good should I do there? I shall get on to the mare and ride home, and send a carriage for my daughter. Her mother will go and bring her back."

"Well, that will be the best plan, if she's fit to be moved, and if not — why — her mother ought to be there," said the cyclist, soothingly.

He assisted Mr. Kemys to rise and held the mare while he mounted; then watched him ride away with mixed feelings of amusement, resentment and pity.

"The brute — never even thanked me, nor so much as asked my name. I needn't have worried about that fee! Well, I suppose he was feeling pretty rotten. Just about the best thing he could do, to avoid another meeting with the motor chap. There'd have been ructions. His lordship looked as if he was a bit used to having his own way too. Kemys of Nantgwilt! Heartless old beggar; sneaking off to save his own skin without waiting to hear if his daughter's dead or alive."

His indignation had time to cool before Lord Yorath returned in the motor.

"I am very sorry," he said, "to have been so long away, but it all took time — why — you are alone!"

The cyclist explained.

"The old man turned queer for a moment. I advised him to keep his temper in future."

"I hope he wasn't hurt."

"Not he. I daresay he had a bit of a shake up. A man falls pretty heavy at that age, and with that figure. He's gone home on horseback to send his wife and a carriage for the girl."

His easy familiarity froze Lord Yorath's friendliness into civility.

"I am quite sure the surgeon will not permit the young lady to be moved," he said, stiffly.

"So am I. But I did not tell the old boy that. He can send his wife and the carriage to his heart's content. I hope her mother will show a little more affection for her than her father does."

"They are neighbours of mine," said Lord Yorath; "and as I'm more or less responsible for the accident I must do what I can to help. Are you quite sure it wasn't because he was hurt, that he went home?"

"He walked quite sound. Don't you worry about him. I gave him a drop of brandy out of my flask."

"You have been exceedingly kind. Can I do anything for you? Will you let the car take you anywhere?" said Lord Yorath, hesitating. "You have been delayed a long while over this affair."

"Oh, Lord, I don't care; I'm only touring, taking a bit of a holiday. Been ill, overworking," said the student, with a laugh. "I'll leave you my address in case you want my evidence at any time, if he's fool enough to bring an action, that is. Or if anything happened to the girl, which isn't likely, I hope. My name's Bewan, Robert Bewan."

He took a card from his pocket-book and handed it to Lord Yorath, who received it, repeating his thanks as cordially as he could.

"Perhaps you'd drop me a line, and let me know if she's all right. I don't want to go back to Lysdinam, which is a dead-alive hole. I stopped there last

night. But I should like to hear I was right, and that there's nothing the matter with the girl but a broken arm."

Lord Yorath promised to write, and shook hands, and in his turn, watched the medical student departing along the highroad on his bicycle.

Then he entered the car, and drove back to the hospital.

Richard Kemys rode slowly home to Nantgwilt, deliberately forcing himself to restrain the mare's paces, and to stifle his own impatience, emotion and anxiety.

He would not dwell upon the thought of the accident, of his ruined dog-cart, nor upon the amount of hurt that Annie had sustained. Suppose she had broken her arm — she was young, strong and healthy — and would make a quick recovery. She had a long life before her, while he —

His mind recoiled, fixing itself dully upon the vital necessity for maintaining his own composure. His iron will bent itself to that purpose.

He must keep calm. Calm and composed. He must not let his feelings get the better of him. He must never let emotion nor excitement of any kind get the better of him again.

His life was dear to him, and he would cling to it fiercely while any shred of hope remained. It depended largely on himself. He resolved to get

down one of those dusty medical encyclopædias that stood on the top shelves of the old library, behind locked doors, and read up all he could find on the subject of angina pectoris.

But such volumes must be out of date; he would send to London for more modern books on diseases of the heart. Perhaps after all he would go up to London and consult — hush, he was growing agitated at the thought; he must be calm. And yet it was very hard. A rush of self-pity almost overcame him. His life was very dear to him, and that life was threatened. He was stunned, incredulous, miserable.

He was in the prime of life; almost a young man still in his own estimation, though his sons would have been amazed that he could think so; and he was strong and vigorous of mind and body; at the very zenith of all his powers.

He knew that it was not an unknown nor even a rare thing for strong and vigorous men in the prime of life to develop heart disease, and he felt that in any one's case but his own he would not have been surprised; but the absurdity of this thought did not strike him.

It was true that his two brothers had died at a much earlier age, but they had never possessed his fine physique. The recollection of their fate even afforded him a momentary gleam of comfort. For he told himself that it was improbable that a just

God could permit his mother, a good woman — a religious woman — to suffer a third such grievous blow — to outlive all her sons.

But the consolation was transient, for through the thick casing of his egotism pierced a sudden stinging doubt whether his loss would, after all, cause such affliction to his mother.

He recalled her sorrow (which he had thought excessive) when his brothers died, and tried to imagine her reception of the news of his own sudden departure out of this world. But his dulled imagination, hitherto exercised generally in the direction of money making, refused to depict her in any but her most prosaic aspect; and he could only hear her remarking in her driest tone that no doubt Providence arranged everything for the best.

He told himself that he cared nothing what anyone said or did after he was gone; but there remained a sore feeling of resentment and bitterness at the suspicion that his going might after all be more of a relief than a sorrow to his family.

With a start he recollected that if he had died in that confounded attack young Rodric would have found himself suddenly independent of everything and everybody; able to join in any scheme he fancied; master not merely of one, but of — how many? thousands of pounds.

Richard Kemys determined to lose not a moment in giving his lawyer instructions for the making of a new will.

Young Rodric must be kept in his place. Everything should be tied up. If he must leave his money behind him there was at least a dismal satisfaction in the thought that he could so arrange matters that for a number of years it would be of little use to anybody. It would be in the hands of trustees. A list of names passed through the mind of Richard Kemys.

He who had trusted no man with his affairs must now perforce trust someone. He could have wept tears of mingled rage and pity when he thought of the energy and trouble he had expended over the making of his money. To what end he had seldom if ever troubled to ask himself, but certainly not to this end. He had vaguely intended to add to his estate; to become eventually a power in his native county. In his youth he had thought of this, and of much more. But youth sees only that time and space are boundless, and shapes its dreams and hopes accordingly.

Middle-age perceives more clearly what an infinitesimal portion of both Fate has pegged out for the individual. Richard suddenly relinquished his ambitions, and realised that he asked no more than to be allowed to go on as he was, until — until when? For another twenty years, at least. But to be taken away from the contemplation of the figures in his bank book before he even needed to use glasses in order to decipher them! It was monstrous and cruel, altogether too bad to be true.

He became alarmed at his own growing agitation of mind, and in the effort to regain his calm, forced his attention away from subjects too engrossing, and turned it towards his immediate outward surroundings.

His mood softened. He looked round with anguished eyes at the familiar landscape — at the blue April sky — the dancing sunlight on the brown river — the feathery birches swaying on the wild hillside above him. These things were dear to him too after his fashion. It could not be that he was to be shut away in the darkness, and know them all no more.

. . .

He dismounted in the stableyard, and in subdued tones, which terrified the groom and stableman, who ran out to meet him, gave a brief account of the accident. He bade them send to the spot where it took place, and collect the remains of the wrecked dog-cart; and meanwhile to prepare the landau at once, which was to bring his daughter home from Lysdinam.

Then he went into the house and called his wife. He learnt that she was at the cottage with his mother and sent old Pryse in search of her.

Annette was with him almost immediately. She found him lying on the sofa in the study.

“Richard, oh, Richard! Are you hurt?” she said and knelt beside him, trembling.

In the midst of his trouble he felt a certain dull sense of comfort in her presence, and in the anxiety of her looks; but he was so unaccustomed to the sensation that he was hardly aware of it, even though it helped to restore his shaken self-confidence.

"Don't waste time," he said with his usual gruffness. "I'm not hurt, though I was thrown into the road and of course I'm a bit shaken; bruised all over, I daresay. It's Annie."

"Annie!" said the poor mother.

"Go and get ready and drive down to Lysdinam and bring her home," said Mr. Kemys, gruffly. "I've ordered the carriage. That d—d officious fool took her to the cottage hospital."

"The hospital? What officious fool? Oh, Richard, is she seriously hurt? For pity's sake tell me everything."

"How can I tell you what I don't know? I tell you I was thrown into the road, and before I had time to recover my senses, that meddling idiot, Lord Yorath, whose infernal car upset the mare, had the impudence to carry her off. They said her arm was broken."

Mrs. Kemys uttered a faint cry.

"Don't be silly," he said, not unkindly, but in a strange subdued manner so unlike himself that it almost alarmed her. "I've said you can go to her, haven't I? They'll have set it by this time, and the sooner she's brought back the better. It can't hurt

her to come in the landau. You'd better take rugs and cushions and things, and go at once and leave me to rest."

But Mrs. Kemys lingered, kneeling by his side.

"Richard, are you sure — are you sure — you are not more hurt than you know?" she faltered. "You look — you speak — there is some change in you. Forgive me," as his fierce blue eyes flashed impatience. "You are so big and heavy to be thrown out into the road. Are you sure there is no internal injury? Won't you let Dr. Harries come?"

"When have I ever sent for a doctor?" he thundered, betrayed by her importunity into his usual fiery manner, almost to her relief.

Then he recollected himself.

"I've told you I want to rest," he said, and turned away from her, closing his eyes.

CHAPTER VI

THE GOD IN THE CAR

MRS. KEMYS drove from Nantgwilt to the hospital outside Llysdinam with her mind in a tumult of anxiety, misery, and self-reproach.

She felt as though — like the wishes granted by malignant elves to hapless mortals in fairy-tales — her wish that her daughter might meet Lord Yorath had recoiled upon her own head in its fulfilment.

The drive seemed terribly long. The coachman, with officious zeal, pointed out to her the scene of the accident, which they were obliged to pass; she shuddered at the débris of the dog-cart by the wayside, and by the time the shabby landau and the old panting horses at length drew up before the newly built cottage hospital, she was almost faint with suspense.

She was vaguely aware of a large automobile standing by the kerb, and that she was saluted respectfully by a smart chauffeur; and she recalled afterwards the dark handsome face of the tall man who came forward to receive her, and whom she knew must be Lord Yorath, though she was too confused to pay attention to his gentle words of greeting.

She was grateful to the white-capped, blue-gowned matron, who, divining her condition, detained her scarcely a moment in the parlour of waiting, but hurried her along the narrow passage into the little room which was reserved for special cases. She gave her soothing report on the way.

.. "All quite right, and nothing whatever to alarm you. A simple fracture just below the elbow. The surgeon was luckily here and able to set it at once. She's been so plucky about it all. But she's suffering a little from shock, and perhaps slight concussion — her head got a nasty knock — so I needn't tell you how quiet she must be kept. You won't let her talk, will you?"

The shaded room was exquisitely clean, if almost bare, save for the white bed. Annie lay there, her blue eyes turned expectant towards the screen which sheltered the door, and her bright hair making sunshine on the pillow.

The nurse beside her rose in obedience to the matron's signal, and withdrew.

Mrs. Kemys bent over her daughter pitifully, pressing the slender hand against her own colourless cheek.

"Oh, my darling. Thank God it was no worse. Don't speak, or only just to tell me if you're in pain, or if I can do anything."

"I promised Nurse I wouldn't talk," said Annie, smiling faintly. "But it's really not very bad, Mum-

mie, and I want to know two or three things. Is Papa hurt?"

"No, no. At least, a little shaken. Nothing more."

"I'm so glad it was only me. Then — Mamma — who was it — who brought me here?" said Annie with varying colour.

"Lord Yorath. I know nothing of what happened except that somehow his motor caused the accident. Don't speak or think of it, my darling."

"I can't remember anything," Annie said, knitting her fair brows, "except that a motor came round the corner. The next thing — a man was carrying me in here. I saw him afterwards in the doorway over there, helping them to put up a screen. I don't remember anything more. It was just a sort of mist with the face in the doorway looking through it. They gave me chloroform or something, I am sure. I found my arm all done up like this. Are you sure it was Lord Yorath? Is he a very big man, very gentle, with a rather hooked nose and fine hazel eyes and clean-shaven?"

"I did not notice his eyes, but he is tall, and clean-shaven. Of course it was him. You're getting excited, darling, there are big spots of colour burning on your cheeks. Don't speak any more, or only just whisper any question."

The next question was whispered.

"Is Papa angry?"

"Hardly at all." Mrs. Kemys betrayed her wonder quite unconsciously. "He scarcely said anything; he did not even worry about the dogcart being smashed. I think he was too anxious about you, I do indeed. He sent me at once with the carriage to bring you home."

"Oh, Mamma, you won't do that?" Annie said. She raised herself in bed, and her eyes grew large with dismay. "Oh, don't. It's so peaceful here. Surely you won't take me away?"

"My darling, don't excite yourself," said poor Mrs. Kemys in despair. "I am sure you ought not to be moved. You shall do as you like."

"And you go home and bear the brunt, poor Mamma. No, I won't do that," said Annie, but the bright eyes filled with tears. "I don't think I *could* stand this pain if I'm to be moved out of this quiet place and taken back home. All the noise, and Papa shouting, and the little boys wanting Sharman every minute—not that Sharman could nurse me like these—" she said, half sobbing and half petulant. "These nurses have made me so comfortable now—all but the pain."

Mrs. Kemys had scarce time to reproach herself for mentioning her mission to Annie at all, before the nurse was back at her post, with a face that betrayed her opinion of the strange propensity displayed by visiting relatives for upsetting patients just when they were doing well.

But her amusement at the notion of Annie's re-

moval from the hospital almost restored the composure of both mother and daughter.

The doctor would never hear of such a thing! He would write a letter of explanation to Mr. Kemys if that were all. Why they weren't out of the wood yet. Had Mrs. Kemys seen the bump on her daughter's head? The doctor wanted to cut her hair off, but the matron said she could manage without that. It would have been a shame. Such beautiful hair. And so on. The soft cheerful babble, and air of complete responsibility and authority restored Annie's confidence, and brought a faint smile to her lips once more.

Mrs. Kemys understood that the best thing she could do was to leave her child in these kind and capable hands; and she could not help feeling that Annie shared this opinion, though she clung to her at parting and whispered sympathetic and anxious counsels concerning the probability of her father's displeasure.

"I don't think he will mind," she said, trying to reassure herself as well as her child. "As nurse says, I can take him a letter from the doctor. That will be the best way; of course you could not be moved against his orders."

"And you can tell her father she can have anything she asks for. We can get her everything in reason," said the nurse, misapprehending the situation entirely, as was natural; "then I daresay he'll be reconciled, especially when he knows how important

it is that she should be kept quiet. No, not another word, please. It's all against orders, and you don't want to do her harm, do you? "

Annie's anxious smile and last look at her mother remained in the memory of poor Mrs. Kemys and made her heart ache with love and longing as she hurried away, divining though she could not observe, the relief her departure would cause her child, who asked only to be left in peace, to suffer what pain she had to suffer as best she might in an atmosphere so much more restful than that of her home.

The matron, taking her back to the little parlour which was her sitting-room, gave her all the particulars she asked for, and told her that Lord Yorath had behaved in the kindest and most considerate manner. The chauffeur had explained how it happened. It was nobody's fault. There was another gentleman who had been bicycling and was anxious to bear witness to this effect. Of course Mrs. Kemys knew how much interest Lady Yorath took in the hospital since her return to Artramont with her son. What a good thing for the county that they should have returned at last, though the old tenants had been so good in their way, etc. Lady Yorath was a charming person, and wrapt up in her son. She came so often to visit them all. The matron pressed Mrs. Kemys to have a cup of tea while she telephoned to see if the doctor were at his house in Llysdinam, and Mrs. Kemys could not refuse, though she would have preferred to drive to the doctor's house.

They entered the parlour and found Lord Yorath waiting there still. The matron hurried away to order the tea.

Lord Yorath did not say that the accident was nobody's fault. On the contrary, he assured Mrs. Kemys very earnestly that he blamed himself bitterly for turning the corner too quickly.

"I might have reflected that it would startle any spirited horse — especially where there is so little traffic," he said. "There was plenty of room, and of course the hooter was sounding, but I ought to have slowed down even more. I shall never forgive myself, and I am afraid you will never forgive me."

"Annie says you were so kind. She remembers nothing except that you carried her in here," faltered Mrs. Kemys.

"I hope you don't think I did wrong to bring her here," he said, colouring all over his dark face. "One had to act quickly, and I did not know how badly she might be hurt. Besides we were so close to this place."

"I am sure you did right."

"I am afraid Mr. Kemys wasn't very pleased with me," said the young man straightforwardly.

"I daresay he was too much — upset to know what he said," said Mrs. Kemys, wondering faintly how far Richard's temper had carried him; for that he had been angry she could not doubt. "He sent me to bring her home, but of course I see that is impossible." She tried to smile, feeling the embarrass-

ment of explanation. "I am going to ask the doctor to write a note for me to take back. Of course it is a little awkward our being seven miles away. I shall be so anxious for news of her, and yet it will not be easy for me to be backwards and forwards as often as I could wish."

Her manner, gentle almost to timidity, her hesitating speech, and the sadness of her faded blue eyes, betrayed more than she was aware, to Lord Yorath.

His generous heart, already inflamed against Richard Kemys, beat yet higher with indignation.

"I have heard he was a brute and a bully," he thought, "and I have seen his callousness to his daughter's suffering with my own eyes. This poor lady is absolutely afraid of him."

The thought made his speech yet gentler, and his manner almost tender in its extreme deference.

"Of course, I quite see," he said. "But my mother is at home now, and she comes over here very often, and when she knows what disaster my carelessness has caused, she will make a point of coming much oftener, I am certain, and of telegraphing to you every morning exactly how your daughter is. I expect she will know just what you wish to be told better even than the nurses or the doctor," he smiled. "She is a very understanding person. We are so close — not three miles off, as you know — which is nothing in a motor — and on the highroad, so that if anything were wanted we could bring it far more quickly than you could send from Nantgwilt.

You'll let me have the consolation of thinking we can help a little, though I don't deserve it, won't you?" he said entreatingly.

As Lord Yorath looked down at her, Mrs. Kemys observed at last the fine hazel eyes of which Annie had spoken, and thought she had never seen eyes of any colour more expressive and sympathetic.

She marvelled to find herself presently talking almost confidentially to this stranger, who seemed to understand her at a word, and before whom difficulties melted like snowflakes in sunshine; so that when she left the hospital at last, she had almost forgotten her dread that Richard's anger might be aroused at her returning alone.

Her heart was warmed and her courage reanimated; she carried the doctor's letter in her hand, which was to prove to her husband the impossibility of moving Annie for the present.

She no longer reproached herself for her wish that Lord Yorath might meet her child. On the contrary she was conscious of secret hopes that her aspirations might yet be fulfilled, though she blushed to detect herself dwelling upon this happy possibility.

"It seems hard that it should be wrong to have such thoughts," she reflected, rather wistfully. "How can a mother help wishing for her child's good? It's not all worldliness, for if he were a bad man in any way, I wouldn't give her to him, if I could — my pretty Annie. But now that I've seen him — the boys are dear fellows, God bless them,"

she sighed, "but they're not like that. He is so gentle, as she said — with that high-bred air; but of course he's much older than they are, and a man of the world, while they are but lads. I have not heard any man speak like that to a woman — since poor Papa died —"

The thought just glanced through her mind that it would have been to just such another as this young man that poor Colonel Myllon would fain have given his only child, as bright and as pretty and as high-spirited then, as was Annie now. But though she paid the tribute of that passing sigh to the memory of the gallant old soldier's pride in her,— it was the present and not the past that absorbed her attention, as she lay back restfully in the old landau, with a smile upon her thin face; soothed by the fresh air, and the unwonted solitude; lost in dreams and flattered by vague hopes that after all, some good might come out of this misfortune which had befallen her child.

She found Richard in the study, pacing restlessly about the room, and she made her report of Annie's condition, and gave him the doctor's letter, which he read contemptuously and crumpled in his hand. But he did not, as she feared, burst into a rage, though his blue eyes glared at her, as though he restrained himself with difficulty.

"Of course they won't let her leave the hospital once they've got her. You don't suppose they get so

many paying patients," he said, breathing heavily. "What are they going to charge for keeping her there? He writes of a private room and every comfort. How much do you think I'm going to pay for it? What are their charges, pray?"

Annette collapsed into a low chair, and looked up helplessly at her husband, who came and stood over her, big and masterful, with his handsome frowning brows knitted above his fiery blue eyes.

"Oh Richard, what will you think of me? If you will believe it, I — I — was thinking so much of — of other things that I never even thought to ask —" she said, faltering.

"You never asked."

She waited for the outburst of rage and indignation that would follow her confession, and shrank back even as she tried to brace herself to meet it. To her surprise it did not come.

He turned away in silence.

His wife was really alarmed by this unwonted behaviour.

"I will go over the first thing in the morning," she said nervously, "and put it right. I cannot think what possessed me that I asked no question of the kind. But in the relief and joy of finding her so comfortable — comparatively — and so brave and cheerful, poor child, in spite of her broken arm, everything else went out of my head. When I think what it might have been — both of you thrown out — it is no wonder that I forgot. No, it was un-

pardonable of me, I know," she added confusedly. "It is very good of you not to be angry with me, dear Richard. I know I really deserve a scolding."

She tried to laugh, and rose and stood beside him, where he had sunk into his elbow chair before the writing table, leaning his head on his hands in moody attitude.

She could not understand his silence, and was vaguely troubled by it. But when he raised his head and looked her full in the face she saw that it was from no lack of anger that he did not speak; but that he was again, for some unexplained reason, making a mighty effort to restrain himself.

The veins on his broad forehead were swollen, and his big hands were trembling. Her heart sank.

They stood thus in silence for a moment, looking at each other, and then he pointed to the door. His wife making no further effort, went away, and left him alone.

Sophy and the little boys were waiting to besiege her with questions, clamouring for her attention and full of anxiety and curiosity to learn the latest news of Annie. They could not imagine why she had been left behind in Llysdinam after all, and not brought home, though the carriage had been sent for her, and a fire had been lighted in her bedroom by Sharman's orders, who had insisted upon this unheard of luxury.

Mrs. Kemys did her best to satisfy them before sending Sophy off with messages to her grandmother, and despatching the little boys to the nursery. Then

she went wearily into her own room to take off her bonnet and change her gown.

The sweet April day was waning, and the glow of hope and cheerfulness which had warmed her heart had been quenched with the last rays of the evening sunshine. Now the primroses in the meadowland beyond the garden fence made only faint patches on the wet fragrant soil about the roots of the old oaks and elms, and the wild cherry trees whitened the dusk of the woods with drifts of blossom which would presently shine like snow in the light of the moon.

If Mrs. Kemys had dared, she would have lingered by the open window, watching the changes of the familiar landscape from April twilight to April dusk. She would also have sent a message to say she was too much upset by the events of the day, to go down to dinner, and would like a little soup sent to her room, where she would lie down upon the sofa and rest. But such action had no precedent, and on the contrary she was obliged to hurry her preparation lest she should be late.

She dreaded the tête-à-tête meal that she would have to sit through opposite her husband's gloomy and scowling face, without the relief of a third presence: for Sophy was not yet deemed old enough to be admitted to the mysteries of late dinner.

There was a knock at her door, and Mrs. Sharman entered, prepared to assist her lady to dress, pour out her hot water, and find out any details concerning the

accident which might have escaped the children's questioning.

Mrs. Sharman had been the master's nurse in her youth, but when he grew to manhood, she quitted the Manor House for a brief term of years, during which interval she was married, and widowed, and left penniless to fight her way in the world with two little sons to support besides herself. She struggled bravely through the hard time of their infancy, and then placed them with relatives, and returned to service in time to receive Mr. Richard's first-born in her arms. Her own sons were no dearer. She had always been a privileged person in the household, tolerated by her foster son, and a favourite with his wife.

But to-night she found Mrs. Kemys uncommunicative.

"The old lady has been in a dreadful state, Ma'am," she observed. "I tried to get Mr. Richard to go over to see her,"—Mrs. Sharman retained the privilege of calling the lord of the manor by his Christian name,—"but he was in one of his moods and there was no getting him to do anything. He would have it Miss Annie was all right, and you'd be sure to bring her back directly her arm was set as if it was no more than a twig as had snapped."

"Oh, Sharman, if you could see her! She looks so pretty in spite of the pain, and they have been so good to her, and made her as comfortable as possible. She begged me to leave her there."

"I said she wouldn't be let to move," said Sharman rustling about in the ample dignity of her black silk dress.

She lingered, aware that her mistress desired her to go, yet restrained by curiosity and interest from leaving the room.

Mrs. Kemys stood before the dressing-glass, fastening a little old-fashioned pearl brooch into the lace collar of the black grenadine which had served her for so many years as a dinner gown. Beside her slight figure, with its rather stooping shoulders, Mrs. Sharman's large proportions looked larger yet. She approached so closely to her lady that Mrs. Kemys could hear the creaking of her tightly-buttoned bodice as her ample bosom rose and fell, making the bunch of charms upon her solid watchchain jingle.

"The men have got talking, since the carriage came back, ma'am," she said confidentially, "as it was Lord Yorath's motor that caused the accident, and him as carried Miss Annie to the hospital and hadn't left her for a moment since. Of course I gave Pryse a hint to make them hold their tongues. But you know what servants is, ma'am, and especially out-door. They will talk. But I couldn't help thinking to myself that if somebody must be upsetting of her, and hurting her poor arm like that, why, it seems like God's providence it should be *him*, as would be the very gentleman of all others in the country-side one would pick out for our Miss Annie."

Mrs. Kemys looked at Sharman in a dismay too

great for words. To hear her most secret aspirations thus unblushingly spoken aloud by the old nurse seemed to put her to shame unutterable.

"You shouldn't say such things, Sharman," she said, almost severely.

"I wouldn't dream of saying them, ma'am, to anyone but you," said Sharman, with a touch of indignation. Then she broke down and began to cry; letting forth her pent-up anxiety of the past hours in a flood of tears and volubility.

"If you knew what a time I've had while you've been gone. Not knowing if my child as is the flower of the flock and the sunshine of the house, was dead or alive, or disfigured maybe for life. And Mr. Richard content to come home and leave her like that, as was always as hard as nails when he was angry, though I can't forget there was a time when he used to put his little arms round my neck and say 'Kiss me, Nana' more coaxing than both his brothers put together if he *was* the black sheep. But there, if nobody else hadn't the courage to tell him of his conduct, leaving my Miss Annie to strangers, *I* had; and I will say he bore it like a lamb; just told me to leave the room or he'd make me without so much as giving me a wicked word. And when I find a bit of comfort thinking one never knows what things may lead to — to be told I'm taking a liberty after all."

Annette's tender heart melted.

"Oh, Sharman, as if I could ever say that to you,

after all we've been through together," she said, putting her arms round the old woman, "and in this very room, where all my children were born; and my little Lucy died in your arms —"

Mrs. Sharman was mollified, and gulped down her emotion.

"Now don't get thinking of sad thoughts the last thing at night," she said, with her usual mixture of deferential coaxing and authority. "But just let me fasten that lace for you, ma'am, and then you'll be all ready for to go downstairs and face the master. Only before you go, I should like to hear — I can't deny it —"

"Oh Sharman! What would you like to hear? You are irrepressible," said Mrs. Kemys, though she knew very well, and shook her head even as she asked the question.

"What the young gentleman is like, ma'am," whispered Sharman, and she looked over her lady's shoulder at her reflection in the glass with twinkling eyes.

CHAPTER VII

RICHARD AT HOME

THE promised telegram arrived next morning immediately after the early breakfast at Nantgwilt, and though it was addressed to the lady of the house, it was opened by Richard Kemys, who took it from the hand of old Pryse and read it, with lowering brow.

"Matron gives satisfactory report of Miss Kemys. Very fair night. No sign of concussion, but doctor says absolute quiet essential as she is suffering from shock."

The signature was *Yorath*.

"It's that officious fool again," said Richard Kemys, in a voice of thunder. "What is he doing at the hospital at nine o'clock in the morning?"

"He said his mother would go over early. She goes almost every day," said Mrs. Kemys. "They built it and are the principal, almost the only — subscribers. Perhaps it was she who sent the telegram."

"I shall give the doctor to understand that his enquiries are not to be answered," said Mr. Kemys. "He not only caused the accident, but was excessively insolent to me. If I hadn't been too shaken to know what I was doing, I'd have thrown him over

the hedge then and there. And now he has the impudence to go and enquire after her and send me telegrams."

"Oh Richard. If he was the cause of the accident, what could he do but enquire? He was the very soul of kindness, and courtesy. I can't think of his ever being anything else."

"Oh! you saw him then," he said, turning upon her sharply. "You said nothing about it."

"How could I say anything about it," said Mrs. Kemys evasively; but the colour mounted to her pale face. "I did not like to provoke you. I knew you blamed him, and he did not deny he was partly responsible for the accident."

"Partly responsible! I hold him entirely responsible, and I shall sue him for damages. Whatever Annie's illness costs me and the mending of the dog-cart — if it's not past mending — he shall pay for, I promise you. I shall write to Machon this morning, and tell him to go over and see Annie at once and get her evidence."

"Oh Richard, not till she is stronger. You see what the telegram says. And it would be of no use, for she remembers nothing. Oh why, why, can't you leave it all alone," said poor Mrs. Kemys despairingly. "And if it's expense you're worried about, as it generally is," she said, ashamed of the suggestion, yet willing to turn his weakness to good account, since she knew not by what other means he could be moved, "then surely you had better let this young

man and his mother show some attention to Annie. I don't for a moment think they'll let you pay for her being there."

"Good heavens, you don't suppose I'd let that hound pay for my daughter," said Richard Kemys, more angry than ever.

"Oh Richard, I don't know what to think. I get so confused. I thought you said you'd make him pay for everything," said the poor lady, bewildered. "I thought if it could be done in a nice friendly way without going to law, how much better it would be."

"I wouldn't have supposed even a woman could be such a fool as to see no difference between accepting charity from your enemy, and forcing him to pay you a sum of money in a court of law," he said with his harsh contemptuous laugh.

"Why should you call him your enemy? And you might not win your case, for indeed he does not look like a person who would be put upon. If you insist on bringing an action he might fight as well as you. And they say that the accident was nobody's fault."

"They say! Who say?"

"Lord Yorath's chauffeur, and the man on the bicycle who saw the accident, and stayed behind to help you," she answered, unexpectedly.

Richard Kemys grew suddenly silent at the mention of the man on the bicycle, and Annette, after waiting a moment, rose to leave the breakfast table,

whence the younger members of the family had already departed.

He called to her as she opened the door.

"Did you see *him* too?"

"The man on the bicycle?" she asked, wondering.

"No, he had gone. The chauffeur said he was ready to swear Lord Yorath was not driving fast and that his horn was sounded frequently. He gave Lord Yorath his name and address in case he should be wanted. I heard it all through the matron."

"A nice set of gossips they seem to be."

"People will talk," said Mrs. Kemys, remembering Sharman's remarks.

"They'd better not talk about me," said Mr. Kemys, and his eyes glittered dangerously. "Look here, Annette, I — I'm going up to London by the mid-day train."

She drew nearer, surprised and alarmed by the nervousness of his manner.

"I've had letters from my office this morning," he said, and broke off in fierce irritation. "Why are you looking at me like that?" Then he remembered that the postbag had not yet arrived. "I don't mean to-day —" he stammered — Richard Kemys was not a good liar — "but for some time past, that have made me dissatisfied, and I've come to a sudden resolution to go up and see how things are getting on for myself. Perhaps I shall let all this stand over till I come back."

"Very well," she said submissively. Her heart suddenly lightened at the thought that for the present at least Annie would not be molested, but she dared not show her satisfaction. "How long shall you be away, Richard?"

"I don't know. I can't tell. That's my business. I suppose I can return when I choose to my own house without giving anyone notice," he growled.

"I only meant — you know the boys will be here for the Easter vacation?"

"The boys' coming and going won't affect my plans. I'm going to see my London lawyer on business, and while I'm there, I shall give him instructions about altering my will."

She waited anxiously.

"I daresay you think I've forgotten all about our conversation yesterday, but I've not. If Rodric chooses to go off to the Argentine against my orders, I'll put Corney in his place, and tie the whole thing up on his children. I'll show them what sort of an eldest son they've got hold of." He laughed long and loud.

"Richard, it would be a wicked thing to do. Yes, I will say it," she faced him indignantly, trembling yet brave in the interests of her first-born and best loved son. "I have never defied you, nor stood out against anything you wished. But this I will oppose. Roddy has been a good boy always; a good son to us both, and you have no right to take his birthright

from him. You were not a good son to your father, Richard, but he did not treat you so. He could have left the property away from you, but he knew he held it in trust morally, though not legally, for the family."

"Go on," he said, with a bitter smile. "It's a new thing to see you in a rage, Annette. It almost makes you look pretty again, bringing the colour back to your white face."

"How can you taunt me like that," she said breathlessly. "Richard, do you want to make me hate you — me — that loved you so — once." Her hands dropped by her side, her voice softened to entreaty. She was not formed for defiance, poor Annette, but for gentleness. Yet she reproached herself that she could not keep up her attitude of righteous wrath, even for the son she loved, and though her soul within her burnt with indignation at the expression on Richard's face as he looked at her, and laughed again, well-pleased at her weakness.

"So you thought *you* could defy me —" he said.

"I could — for the children's sake. If it would do them any good," she said in despair. "If I had the power I would find the courage to defy you — for them."

"Not you," he said, and with a curious change of mood held out his hand to her. Mechanically she moved towards him, but the easy triumph of his half-contemptuous smile arrested her. A change

came over the meekness of her spirit, and for the first time in her life she failed in the response he expected.

The recollection of the gentle and courtly deference rendered to her yesterday by a man of very different breeding brought a deep flush to the worn face that had been so lovely once; and she understood for the first time the anger of her father when his cherished petted child had yielded herself to the bold, rough wooing of Richard Kemys.

She withdrew a pace or two, and stood before her husband, with her thin hands, ringless save for the token of her bond — folded in front of her, and her head erect.

“Richard, you do not know me yet. For the children’s sake there is nothing I would not do. And for yours, it would be best if you would listen to me. I know you despise my judgment, and think that women know nothing of the world or of men. But if they are sometimes blind where their husbands or their lovers are concerned, yet they know their sons and their brothers. They know them as their fathers never know them. I know my boy through and through. He has his faults, but he is not one who would fail. He has your spirit though his heart is softer and kinder than yours, Richard, and he is brave and honest and persevering as a boy can be. If you were wise, you would listen to me, and give him the money, and let him go. Ask Granny’s advice. You often say she is cleverer than I am, and

I daresay she is, though she does not understand my boy so well as I do."

"I am not given to asking advice from women, my dear," he said. "I've no doubt you and my mother would give Rodric a thousand pounds, or ten thousand if you could —"

"I would," she said, with that new ring of defiance in her voice. "I would. Rodric is to be trusted. I would trust him with everything I have in the world, and so would his granny."

"I don't know what you have in the world to trust him with, and luckily I've put it out of his granny's power to hand over her money to anybody," he said with a chuckle.

"No, I have nothing in the world," she said, and her head drooped on her breast. "I can do nothing — but plead for my children, Richard. It is others — who will help them."

"What others?"

"Jack Meredydd will lend him the money."

"Let him," said Richard, shrugging his shoulders. "He won't get it back from me if he does. I've given him fair warning of that. And I shall write and give Rodric warning. I shan't let him know I'm in town though, and mind you don't. I can't be bothered and worried by the boys running after me when I've my business to attend to."

"I should not think of telling him," said Mrs. Kemys, who had no desire that her husband should hold any such interview with her son, away from her

own softening influence. "It is far better to write as you say, but you know, Richard, he is not the boy to be moved by threats. If you told him kindly, that you did not wish him to go — if you appealed to him — there would be more chance of his yielding to you."

"I prefer my own way."

"And if you really are going to do so wrong a thing, why is Courtenay to be passed over," said the mother, catching at straws. "He comes next. What has he done to forfeit his rights?"

"I'll have no sentimental prig of a bookworm in my place," said Mr. Kemys. "Courtenay is capable of giving it all back to his brother in a fit of high-mindedness, and you know it."

"I am thankful to know it. And Corney would do the same, I hope, when the time came."

"I'll take care it's not in his power," said Richard Kemys, and he lit his cigar as a sign that the interview was ended.

Mrs. Kemys sought counsel, as usual, from her mother-in-law.

She had sometimes reproached herself for the habit, declaring that a wife should know better than to allow even his mother to criticise her husband. But circumstances were too strong for her, and though she uttered no word of disloyalty she could not keep up the pretence of calm and well-being with one who shared so poignantly her hopes and fears for

the children, and understood the conflicting elements so well.

Often, in her heart, Annette blamed her husband's mother for the faults of her husband; as many another wife has done before her. If only she had brought him up differently. To be more gentle and considerate, as she herself had taught his sons.

Richard had been the black sheep, as Sharman said, and his mother had let his selfishness and strength of will get the better of her while she exercised her lawful authority only over the docile sons, whose training was so much more easily encompassed.

If he had been taught to master himself in his boyhood, his wife's lot had been an easier one, Annette often thought, and sighed as she thought.

Old Mrs. Kemys in her turn regretted that Annette's fine spirit had been broken down so utterly under the test which her marriage had applied. With her beauty, gaiety and intelligence it seemed incredible that she had never been able to rule the man who had been, at least for a time, passionately in love with her. Mrs. Kemys had rejoiced when she learnt that Richard was to marry the pretty spoilt daughter of Colonel Myllon; she had rejoiced that the Colonel, fuming and fretting, had put every obstacle in the way of the marriage, so that Richard's passion was ardently inflamed and his stubborn will absolutely bent on the possession of the bride thus denied him. She had believed that thus in Annette's

person would the sex despised of her unchivalrous son be avenged. But she had not reckoned on the traitorous softness of the maiden's heart.

Rough, unpolished, masterful as her suitor was, his tempestuous wooing had taken Annette Myllon by storm. The very contrast to her father's gentle urbanity attracted her, since variety is always piquant to the fancy.

Physically, Richard possessed, besides, that breadth of shoulder and strength of muscle that appeals to a woman. His thick hair was brushed from a bold open brow, and his blue eyes, if they held something of sullen ferocity in their expression, yet looked forth from a singularly handsome face; rather large-featured, but altogether manly and virile.

She had never heard a rough word from her father in her life; she heard them in plenty from her lover, even during the days of courtship; yet fascinated, her weakness clung to his strength, and yielded to it, and to the force of his desire. He took her from her father with a laugh of conscious triumph; and the old man rebelled in vain against the dictates of nature, which bade the child of his old age — the petted queen of his heart and home — become the willing slave of a young husband, a man as much inferior to her in breeding and character as he was her superior in wealth and position.

Colonel Myllon had been dead for many years before his daughter's spirit cried to his for forgiveness.

Slowly the experience of motherhood taught her, in her turn, the depth of the suffering she had carelessly, unknowingly, inflicted upon that noble and tender heart of the old soldier, whose one treasure on earth she had been. He had not long outlived her desertion of him, for desertion he felt it to be, though he had seen her almost daily; and he had never overcome his dislike of his son-in-law. Annette had stood between the two men she loved so differently, anxious to keep the peace between them, too much absorbed in her love for her babies to observe how rapidly her father was failing. Perhaps it had been even a dreadful relief when those daily visits need no longer be paid to the Red House. Even Richard could not grumble at her brief pilgrimages to that other yet narrower and humbler dwelling in the old churchyard, where all that was mortal of a gentle warrior and devoted father now lay sleeping. Nevertheless with the passing of his spirit the lingering gaiety and light-heartedness of Annette seemed to fade altogether; and there was no further necessity for pretence; no anxious, loving eyes were watching her fondly. Old Mrs. Kemys kept her jealous watch only upon the children, and sighed because Richard's temper grew worse as they grew older. She reflected that he set a shocking example to his offspring, and pitied while she blamed his wife for her meek submission to his tyranny.

Thus the two women who loved Richard Kemys

made excuses for him, each at the other's expense; neither resenting, while each was instinctively aware, of the other's secret blame.

"If he goes away before the boys come home for Easter, it is the best thing he can do," said old Mrs. Kemys.

"Yes," Annette agreed, "if, as he says, he will not see Roddy in London."

"I should make sure of that. Why not telegraph for Roddy?"

She shook her head. "I dare not."

Mrs. Kemys shrugged her shoulders. "Well — we must trust to Providence. As for altering his will, a man may do it a hundred times, and not die. Richard is as strong as a horse, and in another year or two he will have begun to quarrel with Corney. If Roddy goes out to the Argentine and gets on there, and has the sense to stop there and to refrain from writing aggravating letters, why, Richard will be learning to think him his favourite son before many more years have passed over our heads."

"That is very possible," Annette acknowledged.

"Of course it is possible. He will be for tying up everything he has in the world on Roddy one of these days, or on his unborn sons. Men are curious creatures," said Mrs. Kemys, rather contemptuously. "They never can bear to hand over their money out and out to their natural heirs to do what they like with, even if they happen to be responsible persons of middle age. No, no. They must be for settling

it down and tying it up so that in the next generation some fool of a boy of one and twenty, whom they've never even seen, can play ducks and drakes with it."

"I suppose a man wishes to make his authority felt as long as possible even after he's dead," said Annette, sighing.

"It's his only consolation for not being able to take his money away with him," said the old lady, nodding. "Well — I hope Richard won't meet Roddy, and that his business will detain him in London until we've had time to talk to the poor boy and advise him for the best. And as for dear Annie's mishap — why it's just Providence if her father is kept out of the way. I suppose you'll be going over to see her as soon as Richard has started."

"I am driving him to the station and going on to Llysdinam," said Annette. "Sophy wanted to come with me."

"Just leave Sophy at home. She is only inquisitive, and she will be putting ideas into Annie's head. Besides I thought the child was to be kept as quiet as possible. The less you go yourself the better. Why must you go to-day at all? with this young man and his mother so ready to look after her."

"I could not bear not to see her."

"Mothers never will leave well alone," said Mrs. Kemys impatiently. "Give the child my love, and tell her that her father may be away some time. It will ease her mind, poor love. And take her a few choice violets from her granny." Old Mrs.

Kemys took the bunch from the dwarf brown earthenware pitcher that stood on the table beside her, and dried the stalks with the duster that lay folded within reach of her careful hand.

"Tell Sophy I want her. I'll think of something to keep her quiet," she said, nodding and smiling. Then her manner changed.

"This may be a crisis, Annette. Sitting here away from you all, with nothing to do but to think, I can see that it may be a crisis for Annie, and for Roddy, God bless them both, the flowers of the flock as Sharman says. You'll need to steer your way carefully."

"I feel it, Granny." Annette's pale face drooped over the fragrant dewy violets she held, which formed a refreshing contrast to the faded roses in her old black shady garden hat, and to the grey gown which by its very plainness emphasized the thinness of her figure. "What can I do. I am so helpless."

"Helpless! That is what a woman need never say when she has her mother-wit to help her, and only a man to deal with," said the old lady sharply. Then she softened, but Annette felt acutely the undercurrent of contempt in the very kindness of her tones. "It's not mother-wit, nor tact nor patience that you lack, but just courage," she said. "Courage to stand up for your children if you can't for yourself — whenever you get the chance."

"If God would give me the chance,— I will find the courage," said Annette.

CHAPTER VIII

ANNIE IN THE HOSPITAL

THE little whitewashed room at the cottage hospital was transformed into a bower of blossom. A white camellia in perfection of bearing stood in the window; the chimney-piece was a mass of hothouse bloom carefully selected for its scentlessness; but on the table beside the patient's bed stood a basket of large-belled lilies of the valley, a bowl of Parma violets, and a jar of specimen roses, filling the air with delicate perfume.

"I was afraid they would be almost too much for her, but she does love them so. They all come from Artramont of course. The glass-houses there are so beautifully kept now; very different from the old days. Lady Yorath has a passion for flowers, she says, and she told your daughter she was just like a rose herself in the midst of them all," said the matron, taking a sly pleasure in the glow of colour instantly called by her words to the sweet face on the pillow.

"Oh, Mamma," Annie said, "everyone has been so kind. You're *not* going to take me away?"

"No, no, my darling. It's all right. Papa has gone to London," whispered Mrs. Kemys, and the

gladness in the wide blue eyes gave her a slight pang of self-reproach, for in spite of herself she shared Annie's relief.

"He was obliged to go up on business, and he may be away some time," she continued, recklessly adopting her mother-in-law's advice to give Annie all the peace of mind possible under the circumstances. "So you can be quite easy and think of nothing but getting well. Now the flush has died away, you are very white and wan, my darling. Has the night seemed very, very long?"

Annie made light of her sufferings partly in compassion for her mother's anxious looks and partly because her mind was filled with the wonderful happenings of the morning.

"Mamma, he was over here at eight o'clock this morning to enquire after me," she said, with the colour coming and going under her transparent skin. "And at ten Lady Yorath came with all these flowers. She had arranged them herself. Oh, Mamma, she is an angel! and do you know she looks much younger than you though she must be — why *he* is twenty-nine," said Annie, in awestruck tones.

"She is some years older than I, but then — she has only the one son —" said Mrs. Kemys, as though to defend herself. "Yet she must have known trouble, poor thing, for her husband died when Lord Yorath was only a little boy."

"I suppose it would depend on what he was like whether *that* was a trouble," said Annie, naïvely.

"But oh, Mamma, she is so sweet. I have never seen anyone the least like her, and directly I am well enough to be moved she wants me to go over to Art-ramont. She made the doctor say it could be to-morrow or next day; and she says it would be better for me than going home because it is so much closer, and I ought to have a little change after the shock! She put it so nicely. Oh, Mamma, do you think — could you — could anybody persuade Papa to let me —"

"You shall go if we can possibly manage it," said Mrs. Kemys, soothingly. Her own heart beat a little faster. The ecstasy of Annie's expression touched her. She cast about wildly in her own mind for ways and means of securing this outing — this rare pleasure and chance for her little daughter; yet dared not encourage her to hope overmuch lest bitter disappointment should follow.

"Artramont is a very fine house, dearest," she said wistfully, "and fashionable people stay there. Lady Yorath herself, however kind — is a very fashionable woman — and you have so few things —"

"I have thought of all that," said Annie, with sparkling eyes. "And if you will but send Sophy to me, we can manage it all. Nurse says I shall be lying down for some time yet, because the doctor thinks I have been shaken rather badly. I am bruised all down one side, you know. Well, Mummie dear, I have the money I meant to spend in Llys-dinam yesterday, you know, and Sophy can take it

and get me some pretty pink stuff and make me a wrapper. Then I shall look all right, Mamma, and there is my new white cotton frock for getting up and coming away in. Sophy would put away all her own work and get the things for me, for the honour of the family, I know," said Annie, proudly.

But Mrs. Kemys, being a little more sophisticated in such matters than her daughter, was, it is needless to say, not inspired to much enthusiasm by the prospect of a pink wrapper and a new cotton frock. She sighed and shook her head.

"Didn't he say how long he would be away *exactly*," said Annie suddenly, and Mrs. Kemys was obliged to acknowledge that her lord had not enlightened her on this point.

"But he took his portmanteau as well as his bag, and I believe he thought it possible he might be detained," she said.

"You'll let me know as soon as you do, won't you, Mamma? And what can I say to Lady Yorath? She's coming again this afternoon."

"I should like to thank her, but perhaps I had better not until I know what Papa means to do," said Mrs. Kemys. "Granny sent you all the violets from her little frame, my darling, but they look nothing beside that great bowl of Parma violets."

"But they are far sweeter," said Annie, putting them to her lips with her usual ready graciousness. Then she returned to the charge.

"Oh, Mamma, do you think such a wonderful

thing could possibly happen to *me*. To go and pay a real visit all by myself. Just think that I have never, never been anywhere nor done anything so delightful! Couldn't you — I don't want to be selfish, but couldn't you *make* it happen? If I went now, while Papa is away, need you tell him till he comes back?" Her voice sank to a whisper. "After all, what could he do? He couldn't kill us. He could only be — dreadful, and he is often that over nothing at all. I don't see how he could be much worse if we gave him real cause to be vexed for once. Oh, Mamma, I know it sounds very wicked of me — but couldn't you, couldn't you — just for once?"

"I thought of it, Annie," said Mrs. Kemys, in no less furtive accents. "But, Annie dear, if he came back and heard you were at Artramont, and went over there to fetch you away, and made some terrible scene. Wouldn't that be worse than your not going there at all?"

She had never spoken so openly to her daughter before on the subject of her father's infirmity of temper, and Annie felt scarcely less guilty than she did. By mutual consent they avoided meeting each other's eyes.

"It would be very dreadful," said Annie, beneath her breath. "But no, Mamma, I don't think it would be worse. They would know it wasn't my fault." She gathered courage and spirit as she proceeded. "And I should have broken the ice and perhaps have had two or three days — Paradise. I

am sure it would be Paradise to stay with *her*. It would not be so difficult perhaps to make him see reason another time, if we stood up to him boldly once. Oh, Mamma," said Annie with the repressed impatience of decisive youth for its hesitating elders. "If you only had a *little* courage,—"

"You all sing the same song," said Mrs. Kemys, and she smiled rather sadly. "Let me wait and see what I hear from Papa to-morrow. Let me have the night to think it over. Oh, my darling." She knelt beside the bed, and pressed the little fair hand that lay on the coverlet against her thin cheek in a sudden passion of feeling. "Do you think you are half as anxious that you should have the natural pleasures of your age as I am for you? If I can manage it by hook or by crook you shall have this outing. There, I promise you. Only don't think of it too much, or you will be excited and feverish. Lie still and get well, like a good child."

But Annie placed little faith in her mother's promise, and the look with which she buried her face in the violets went to Annette's heart.

She left her daughter earlier than she had intended, in the desire to avoid meeting Lady Yorath; but after all she met her at the very door of the hospital.

The two ladies were strangers, although they lived only ten miles apart, a trifling distance in so scantily populated a neighbourhood.

Artramont had been let during the young lord's

long minority, and his mother had acquired the habit of dividing her time between the house in London and the lodge in Scotland, when she was not in Italy, where she possessed a villa of her own upon the Lakes.

The tenants of Artramont had been an old couple, who had become attached to the place, and when one died, at the age of eighty, the other, also an octogenarian, made a pathetic appeal to be allowed to remain in the home he had occupied for so many years.

Even if the offer had been a less advantageous one from a material point of view, Lord Yorath and his mother were the last persons in the world who would have been inclined to resist it under the circumstances. They left the old gentleman undisturbed in his tenancy during the few years which remained to him, and, when he died, came down to take possession and continued the good works which had been started and maintained by the old couple, who had from first to last proved themselves benefactors to the neighbourhood, and were universally mourned.

The owners felt themselves strangers, during their few weeks' annual residence in the home from which they had so long been exiled; but they became speedily popular in their turn. Lord Yorath built the cottage hospital, and improved the housing of the labourers on his estate; Lady Yorath diligently returned the calls of her country neighbours, and, if she occasionally sighed with relief when she found

them absent from home, she showed every inclination to be hospitable in her own house, and gave dinners, garden parties, village fêtes and school-treats without stint, that no one, high or low, should lack entertainment.

Lady Yorath and Mrs. Kemys had missed each other in calling, and Richard Kemys had declined to permit his wife and daughter to take part in any of the festivities organized by the newly returned owners of Artramont. But the two ladies, now meeting for the first time, recognized each other instinctively.

"I hope you're not very angry with us," said Lady Yorath, stretching out both hands. "If you could only see into our hearts and realise how *dreadfully* sorry we are, for your pretty daughter's broken arm and all the anxiety we have unwittingly caused. The only comfort is that her dear, sweet, lovely face has not even a scratch upon it. But I should be very angry all the same if I were you."

Her expression was pathetic, half in fun, and half in earnest, and Mrs. Kemys realized that Annie was right and that Lady Yorath, who was nevertheless some years her senior, looked younger than herself.

She was very tall, almost statuesque, but her figure was so beautifully proportioned that her height only added to the grace and dignity of her carriage. She wore a walking dress of violet cloth, exquisitely cut but severely plain, and a purple toque rested upon her dark, beautifully-dressed hair.

From his mother Lord Yorath had evidently inherited his marked aquiline features, dark colouring and bright hazel eyes, but in her all these traits were softened into feminine beauty. Were the charms ever so slightly heightened by art? Or was it only that she possessed the indefinable gift bestowed upon the favoured few, of knowing exactly what became both the occasion and herself?

Mrs. Kemys was too inexperienced to know, but the genuine friendliness, the appealing warmth of the greeting dispelled her usual nervousness. "How could I be angry? It is merciful it was no worse. Annie is overcome by your kindness," she said.

Lady Yorath in turn was attracted by the unaffected gentleness of poor Mrs. Kemys. She observed every detail of the shabby toilette, and its anxious, almost threadbare decency; even as she observed the refinement and simplicity of the wearer.

"Why haven't we met?" she said impulsively. "Why has it been reserved for this dreadful accident to bring us together, so that I and my son must appear to you in a most unfavourable light? Oh, I know I hadn't really anything to do with it, but we are so much one that I always take his sins on my own soul, though God forbid he should do the same by me." She laughed merrily. "He said you promised to let us do everything in our power to make up for it, and to that promise I mean to hold you, more especially now I have seen her!

You'll let your pretty child come over to me, to be nursed and petted, won't you? If you knew how I have longed all my life for a daughter — I that am left alone for months and months when Austen goes off after his horrid big game shooting from which I never expect to see him return alive."

Her quick words poured themselves forth in a voice expressive of as rapid changes of feeling.

"Do let me have her," said Lady Yorath, coaxingly, and Mrs. Kemys could only stammer a word or two in reply, of her being very glad — but her father's absence — Annie had never been away from home — etc. etc.

"Oh why need we tell him until it's a *fait accompli*?" said Lady Yorath, with an understanding that seemed almost uncanny to Annette. "Men always make difficulties. Even the doctor couldn't see how she was to be moved to Artramont for the present, though he was obliged to confess that nothing could be easier after I had shown him the way. She must come, and you, too, if you will."

"Oh, I! I could not leave home! I have never left home except for a few days' shopping in London now and again, for twenty years," said Mrs. Kemys, and she laughed at the look of horror which Lady Yorath, like an alarmed child, turned upon her, though it gave place instantly to sympathetic amusement.

"Oh, how I envy you. We have lived the lives of *vagrants*," she said vehemently, and really be-

lieved for the moment that she regretted her existence of constant change and interest. "I told Austen it was peace and joy to be really settled at last, and Artramont *is* his home and will be mine until he takes unto himself a wife." Again the merry dark eyes became pathetic. "You know he really *ought* to marry," she said seriously.

Poor Mrs. Kemys blushed guiltily, almost trembling, as though the quick glance of Lord Yorath's mother had pierced her very soul; but she was habitually self-controlled, and did not betray herself other than by that faint change of colour.

"Certainly he ought to marry," she said, in the soft slow tones that contrasted so curiously with Lady Yorath's excessive quickness.

As vivid a contrast was presented by the two vehicles drawn up at the door of the hospital. The neat green, well-appointed motor brougham, with its coroneted door, and smart driver and attendant, and the shabby open landau, with its half obliterated crest, worn lining and mended harness, and the old coachman in faded livery flicking at the ancient horses, who stood with drooping heads and their aged legs tucked under them.

"All of a bunch," as he said resentfully to himself, when he perceived her ladyship's bright eyes glancing them over; but no amount of flicking would make those overworked quadrupeds comport themselves with dignity.

Yet the coachman, who was a native of Llydsi-

nam, comforted himself, like old Mrs. Kemys, with the reflection that *his* people had been lords of the manor of Nantgwilt when Lord Yorath's grandfather had been trudging through the forest shouldering his pick, alongside of his mates, whose grandsons trudged there to this day. He cast glances of contempt upon the spick and span turn-out of her ladyship's London servants, who did not know their employer's family history any more than they had ever heard of Kemys of Nantgwilt, and who would not have cared if they had known, being much concerned with the present, and utterly indifferent to the past.

Mrs. Kemys listened almost absently while Lady Yorath poured forth her plans for the removal of Annie from the hospital and her instalment, with a maid, and if necessary a nurse in charge, at Artramont; her own mind was busy with possibilities.

Now that she saw and recognised the charming personality of Lord Yorath's mother, she perceived that many difficulties might be smoothed away. She would not have liked, poor lady, to mention the subject of Annie's meagre equipment for visiting to any of her neighbours at Nantgwilt; and would rather have died than appear conscious of any deficiencies before old Mrs. Byewater, for instance, of whose secret criticisms the Squire's wife was often ruefully aware, more from that divining instinct possessed by the ultra-sensitive than from actual hearsay, though that too had played its part in the matter.

When Annie called at the Red House she knew very well that a little chorus of comment followed her departure, and that she would be criticised as she had been scrutinized, from top to toe, by her old neighbour.

"Did you see her hat? The same she wore last summer, but poor Sophy has evidently had to re-trim it."

"I wonder Mrs. Kemys cares to let Annie be seen in such short skirts. That pink cotton has shrunk in the wash again. I wonder how often it has been washed."

"I'm sure her mended shoes and darned stockings are not so ornamental that she need show so much of them."

Yet, if they had been questioned on the subject, they would have answered resentfully, and even with sincerity that they loved Annie Kemys, and admired her, and only wished to see her dressed in accordance with her station.

Mrs. Kemys realized that Lady Yorath's admiration of Annie, freely expressed, was of a different quality. She also realized how easy it would be to confide in one who was too well bred, and consequently too simple, not to receive such a confidence as frankly as it was made; and to ask if they were to be alone, and whether in that case it would not matter that Annie possessed only the wardrobe of a little country girl who had never paid a visit in her life.

Annie's mother knew intuitively that Lady Yorath was absolutely devoid of the middle-class instinct of criticism, and vulgar habit of appraising human beings by their possessions rather than by their personal attributes; that she would, figuratively speaking, shrug her shoulders at bores and mediocrities in silk attire, and turn with her most gracious smile to welcome wit and beauty and good breeding in rags.

"Then it is settled, and you'll let her come to us if you possibly can, and she won't mind our being practically alone, for we have no Easter party this year. Only an old fogey or two to keep me company," said Lady Yorath, thus unconsciously settling the question in the other's mind.

Mrs. Kemys pleaded for time to write and consult her husband before giving a decisive answer to the kind invitation thus warmly pressed upon her; but it was for two days' respite to enable her to make up her own mind, that Annette was really pleading.

CHAPTER IX

RICHARD IN LONDON

RICHARD KEMYS looked from the windows of the train upon the flying landscape; at the hilly orchards, where primroses dotted the rough pasture, broken up by the hoofs of shaggy ponies and bony cart-horses, and flecked with the spring sunshine; at the long shadows falling from the budding trees across the wet meadows; at thatched roofs glistening in the low ruddy golden light of the afternoon, and at the pink peach and snowy plum flowering gaily in cottage gardens.

The brightness of the day could not dispel his settled gloom. He smoked and thought and thought and smoked, and the gist of all his reflections was that it was very hard that he, of all men, who had lived such a careful, temperate life, should thus be threatened with sudden extinction through no fault of his own.

He told himself that his principal object in going to town was to see his lawyer concerning the making of a new will; but his intention to consult a specialist lurked at the back of his mind all the while. He tried to divert his thoughts by making rough notes in his pocket book of the instructions he proposed to

give Mr. Joavan; but the more contingencies he endeavoured to provide against the more complicated became the notes, and growing impatient, he presently obliterated them in a rage, and put the notebook back in his pocket.

He found oblivion at length in snatches of uneasy slumber, which lasted until his arrival at Paddington.

It was his custom to put up at the Great Western Hotel, and since it was too late, when he arrived there, either to seek his lawyer or to go to his office, he went straight into the coffee-room, and asked for a cup of tea and a Post Office directory.

From the directory he went to the telephone, and thence to the reading-room, where he wrote a letter and marked the envelope *urgent*.

The letter written, it seemed to become imperatively necessary that it should be delivered by hand, and without delay.

He looked at the clock — hesitated — looked at the address on the envelope which he had just written, and took up his hat.

“I have nothing on earth to do,” said Mr. Kemys, as though apologising to himself, “and the walk will be good for me.”

After this he appeared to abandon all pretence to indifference, though he had no idea how fast he was walking.

A middle-aged man, with a white face, mopping

his brow and breathing hard, presently delivered a letter to a servant at the door of a gloomy house in Harley Street; and said he would wait for an answer.

He refused to enter the house, and remained on the steps, telling himself that the weather was too warm for walking in stifling, airless, dusty London streets, and that he should return to the hotel in a hansom.

After what seemed an interminable delay, a note was handed to him. He tore it open without waiting for the servant to shut the door. It was an early appointment for the following morning.

The impatience of Richard Kemys had always been abnormal, and his promptness in seizing an opportunity had once made him suddenly a rich man. The letter proved that the specialist was at home.

He thought of the miseries of suspense and restlessness he had endured during his journey to London, and reflected that the suspense and restlessness of the coming night would probably transcend these miseries.

"The doctor sees no one without a special appointment, sir," said the maid, reading the expression on the caller's face, and being unacquainted with Richard Kemys, she steeled her heart in preparation for seeing him turn dejectedly away.

Ten minutes later it was the maid who felt dejected; for she had been bullied by the visitor, and snubbed by her master, who was now nevertheless interviewing his insistent patient in the consulting

room. Richard Kemys had obtained his own way without even resorting to that bribery which might have consoled his vanquished opponent.

As he left Harley Street he told himself that his visit had been unsatisfactory, but his expression and carriage betrayed a certain relief from suspense; hope lent a sparkle to his steel blue eyes, and determination a yet straighter and more obstinate line to his handsome mouth.

"He won't say it wasn't *angina pectoris*, in fact he evidently thinks it was; in spite of his jargon about true *angina pectoris* being rare at my age. What does it matter to me whether it's rare or common if I've got it? And though he's obliged to admit he couldn't find organic disease yet he hedges by saying that even a skilled physician can't diagnose a case like mine with certainty, and prates about it being more a disease of the arteries than the heart. I wish to God he'd tell me something definite. Either that I'm to get well or die, and be done with it, instead of threatening me with an invalid life and talking of my nerves. It's the first time I ever heard I suffered from nerves. The fact is, with all their science they know precious little about it all, and he's told me no more than that young fellow in the road told me for nothing."

For all this he was resolved to follow the doctor's directions implicitly, and the more especially when they coincided with the advice bestowed upon him gratis by the young medical student.

He had begun by informing the specialist that he had never had the slightest cause to suspect that his health was anything but perfect; but gradually he had found himself admitting increasing breathlessness after exertion, restlessness at night, and a besetting nervous irritability, which indeed had betrayed itself so frequently during his cross-examination that the doctor might have omitted this question. In fact, he was surprised and chagrined to discover that Nature had given him many warnings which he had altogether ignored or misunderstood.

Skilfully the doctor extracted a good deal of information, before he delivered the guarded and rather contradictory opinions which had so much discontented his patient.

He prescribed the remedies to be kept always at hand in case the attack should be renewed, and was emphatic regarding the absolute necessity of maintaining a perfect tranquillity of mind and body, but he offered besides another suggestion which rather recommended itself to Richard Kemys.

"Yes, yes," said the doctor, soothingly, "no doubt you are right. When a man has, as you say, a business in London and an estate in the country to look after, and grown-up sons and daughters to plague him into the bargain, it's practically impossible to be free from worry. The question is — couldn't you get right away from it all? If you're a good sailor and like the sea — for instance — why not take a voyage round the world? Your illness

is largely nervous. Go away and stop away until you've forgotten your worries and calmed your nerves. Of course you wouldn't go alone — take your wife with you — or a sympathetic friend — ? ” said the doctor, watching him. “ You prefer to go alone, eh ? ”

“ Of course I should prefer it — if I went at all, ” growled Mr. Kemys.

The notion that he could be troubled with nerves and the mention of a sympathetic friend vaguely annoyed him ; but on the whole his mind fastened hopefully upon the scheme. A long voyage would give him the opportunity of regaining his mental and physical balance, which he was aware had been considerably shaken by his recent alarming experience. And the prospect of throwing off his domestic cares for a while was not an unpleasant one. His sensations resembled those of the prisoner to whom after many years the idea of trying to escape occurred quite suddenly, and who then merely opened the door of his ill-guarded gaol and walked out into freedom. Richard Kemys had enjoyed many sea-trips as a young man, when his business had necessitated constant voyages to Sweden, but it had not occurred to him since he had become rich, to extend his acquaintance with travelling nor to indulge in a long holiday.

The doctor's recommendation of a companion troubled him a little ; he thought it sounded slightly ominous ; as though he thought it possible his patient

might die on the voyage. But he dismissed this notion from his mind as quickly as possible.

"I'll think it over. It's not a bad idea. Perhaps I'll go," he said ungraciously to his adviser.

He stopped at a chemist to have the doctor's prescription made up; getting carefully and slowly in and out of the hansom, mindful of the orders he had received to avoid sudden exertion or violent movements; and as soon as he returned to the hotel busied himself by looking through the P. & O. and other mail companies' advertisements and time-tables for voyages round the world.

His plans occupied him throughout his frugal dinner, and during the long dull evening which followed; and kept him awake when he went to bed. He had thought for a moment of telephoning to Rodric, and bidding him come round to dine with him after all, but a moment's reflection decided him to dismiss the idea. He had written to his son before leaving home, to express his intentions, and there was no more to be said. An interview with Roddy would be an agitating one, as he would almost certainly be roused to that anger which the doctor had warned him was the emotion of all others to be shunned.

He even began to doubt the advisability of visiting his lawyer on the morrow. Old Joavan would be almost sure to argue with him on the subject of

his decision to alter his will; or irritate him by raising unforeseen difficulties in the way of carrying out his intentions.

It might be simpler to draw up a short temporary will for himself on half a sheet of notepaper, leaving all his possessions in trust for little Corney, since his marriage settlement provided for his wife, and gave her power of appointment over a considerable sum of money, in favour of her sons and daughters, in such proportions as she chose.

“Why should he be bound by any absurd conventions and prejudices about eldest sons? Why should he not choose the son he preferred to be his heir?” said Richard Kemys to himself. He tossed and turned on his pillow, sleepless, while a little army of thoughts marched buzzing across his brain in the darkness.

Corney is a fine little fellow, and a third son, the same as I was. Of all my sons he is the only one that takes after me, as old Sharman and my mother have said many a time, who knew me best at that age. He would never irritate me as his brothers do. They take a pleasure in irritating me, it's my belief, Roddy looking at me just as old Colonel Myllon used to look at me, with the same confounded touch-me-not air that I always hated; and his grandfather's features as well as his expression, by Jove. And Courtenay a prig and a bookworm that will never be fit for anything but a parson. Why should I leave my money to them, or my estate for that mat-

ter, so long as it's a Kemys that has it? I've paid for Nantgwilt. My money cleared off the mortgages and set it free. A man has the right to do what he will with his own; and a long minority would be a capital thing for the estate if —"

He left his sentence unfinished, but the more he considered his scheme the more he liked it. It amused him grimly to imagine old Joavan's chagrin when the lengthy testament to which he had given so much thought and attention should be produced only to be superseded by half a sheet of hotel notepaper. There was a curious kink in Richard's brain which made him glad to outwit the very man for whose expert advice he was paying, and of whose wisdom and honesty he had long been assured.

He was no less assured of the worth of John Bond, the manager of his business, whom he determined to appoint as one of his trustees, while the other, he decided, with a chuckle, should be old Turley of Llysdinam, who had the business of the Nantgwilt estates at his fingers' ends.

"He won't refuse to act, if only for Annette's sake, and because he was devoted to my father and hers," thought Richard, "and I'd trust him with untold gold, though I wouldn't have him meddling with my affairs when I succeeded. It will be a sell for Machon to find old Turley put back again. I don't trust Machon a yard; he's no class, and considered as a lawyer, he's little better than a fool, but he does what he's told, and that suited me better than getting

advice and sermons from old Turley. But he won't be able to play any tricks with Turley, who'll have every single document out of him the day he finds himself once more lawyer to Kemys of Nantgwilt — or know the reason why."

The thought of Machon's discomfiture also pleased him, with perhaps more reason, for the man's incompetence and stupidity had roused his contempt and fury a thousand times so that only his native obstinacy had deterred him from carrying his country affairs back to the family solicitor.

He was so much soothed and amused by his ingenious schemes for the final disposition of his affairs that in some odd way he found himself contemplating the prospect of his own demise with more equanimity.

"After all," he thought with dismal philosophy, "it's got to be faced sooner or later, and if it's to be a few years sooner —" and again he left the sentence unfinished.

He had enjoined secrecy upon the doctor as he had enjoined it upon the medical student, and his letter to his wife the next morning, mentioning the possibility of his departure from England, did not contain a single reference to his illness.

He said to himself that pity was the last thing he desired, and that if he hinted that his health were ever so slightly affected she would insist upon the farewell scene which of all things he desired to avoid.

He never for a moment entertained the possibility of taking her with him; of recent years she had seldom left Llysdimam, even for the shopping expedition to London which had once been her greatest pleasure; with increasing expenses Richard Kemys had shown increasing parsimony, and thus, since her sons had grown up, Annette had remained at home.

The thought that her companionship might make the voyage more agreeable, never even entered her husband's mind; far less the thought that she might enjoy such a break in her monotonous existence.

Though he despised her capacities, as men of his calibre often despise the capacities of women, yet he relied upon her and upon her alone to carry out during his absence every detail of the régime he had established at Nantgwilt, and it was to her clear head and quiet good-sense as well as to her devotion to himself and his interests that he unconsciously trusted, when he chose to leave her, rather than his man of business, in charge at Llanon.

"Dear Annette," he wrote, in his usual business-like fashion, "I shall not be back as soon as I expected, in fact there is a possibility of my being obliged to be away for some time. I may establish a branch of my business in New Zealand. This would involve a trip to the spot, and I don't see why John Bond should take so long a holiday when I have nothing to do just now, and could as easily go myself. Say nothing of this however for the present,

as the matter is not absolutely decided. If I go I will open a small account for you at the bank in Llysdyham, so that you can pay the monthly bills and wages by cheque.

"I shall also send a line to Pugh telling him of course to look after everything as usual and to report to you instead of to me. You'll write down all his reports and keep his accounts and your own so that I shall know exactly where I am when I return. If you are in any difficulty you can go, as you always do, to my mother. She gets old Turley's advice for nothing and can pass it on to you. Of course everything will go on exactly as usual and Corney go to school as arranged, after the Easter holidays. It would be far better if Manuel went too instead of being coddled up at home, but he can wait till he's eight as you make such a point of it.

"I haven't seen Roddy and don't mean to, as I'm very busy, and he can write me his intentions in answer to the letter I wrote him before leaving home, but I'm quite aware he means to go whether I wish it or not, and I shall act accordingly.

"I am writing to tell Machon to take up the affair of the damages for the dog-cart —" then he paused, and after a moment's thought, deliberately drew his pen through the lines, knitting his heavy brows together in a frown as he did so.

It would have been a pleasure to bring an action, and obtain damages from that insolent fellow —

his blue eyes flashed — but unless he could attend to the matter himself it had better be left alone. Machon was such a fool that he would mismanage the case from start to finish. And on no account must he be there himself, even if his plans had permitted of the delay, for he had some experience of the excitement the fighting of such cases may entail upon the combatants. There was also another obstacle: if during his absence that knowing young medical student appeared as a witness, as he had threatened, for Lord Yorath, the fact of his own seizure might come out in court. Richard Kemys determined fiercely that he would keep his secret to himself; he had a morbid horror of the possibility that he could be regarded as an object of pity; nor could he endure the thought of the alarmed tolerance with which his neighbours and his family would suffer his outbursts if they knew that at any moment he might drop down dead in their midst.

“On second thoughts,” he wrote, “if I do go to New Zealand there wouldn’t be the slightest use in bringing any action, for Machon is utterly incapable of managing it without me, even if my presence otherwise could be dispensed with. I shall leave the whole thing in abeyance until my return. Probably I shall be able to let you know to-morrow what I decide to do, but I might be hurried at the last moment so it is safest to write these details now.

“The weather is muggy and warm. I’m off to

King William Street; you'd better address there as I may sleep at the office to-night, and shall any way be there all to-morrow.

“Your affectionate husband,
“RICHARD KEMYS.”

This document cost him neither pains nor thought, and was scribbled off at a great rate, but the drawing up of his will upon the half sheet of note-paper was a different matter. It was presently accomplished, however, with a clearness and conciseness that roused his own admiration, and having made two copies in his distinct strong writing, he rang and asked for the manager and a clerk to witness his signature. He then enclosed the signed and attested sheet in a sealed envelope, and forwarded it to Mr. Joavan with instructions that it was to be opened in the event of his death, and that a copy of its contents would be sent to his wife.

Then he rose and stretched himself, and looked out of the window into the crowded street of hurrying traffic and foot-passengers. He observed a group of flower girls, laughing and talking in a corner; they were laden with baskets of tulips, hyacinths, wallflowers, primroses and violets and the gay colours of the spring blossoms carried his thoughts away from the motley crowd of passing and re-passing human beings to his own sunny quiet old-world garden at Llanon. Perhaps he would never walk those familiar ways again. He was conscious of a

pang of strange grief. It was as though his own sorrow touched his unseeing eyes and opened them suddenly to the sorrow of all the world, to all the sadness of the passing of time, and the uncertainty of human life.

The sensation however vivid, was but momentary, and then he remembered that all emotion was to be avoided, and turned away from the window, hardening his heart.

As he turned, a man nodded to him, and he started.

"I thought it was you," said the easy familiar tones of the medical student. "Come up to see a doctor eh?"

Richard felt almost inclined to contradict him, but the unconscious good humour of the young man's expression disarmed resentment, and he grunted an assent.

"Who'd you go to?"

Richard gave the name.

"I could have told you of a better man. What'd he think?"

"How can I tell what he thought?" said Richard in surly tones. "He talked for twenty minutes and said nothing. Whether because he'd nothing to say, or because he wouldn't tell me anything I don't know."

The medical student's serious look of interest betrayed him into giving a gloomy and satirical account of his interview with the specialist.

"He thinks someone ought to go with me—" he ended sardonically. "I suppose you wouldn't like the job?"

The words escaped him almost unawares. He had been turning over the doctor's counsels uneasily in his own mind.

"Wouldn't I just?" said the student, with a careless laugh. "I'm at a loose end. Not to go back to work for three or four months. I'm stopping here to-night and off to Devon and Cornwall to-morrow with my trusty bike. It's dull work holiday making alone."

Richard Kemys looked hard at the medical student and the medical student returned his look with the frank independence that characterized him.

Again the elder man thought of the doctor's words urging him not to set forth upon his travels alone; he reflected that if he were to take anyone with him he might as well take someone who would know what to do in case of emergency; and especially if he could make a bargain —

"You'd have to look after me if I was ill," he said abruptly, "and I'd do no more than pay your return fare."

"Are you in earnest?" said Robert Bewan, flushing.

"I'm not given to jesting."

"A voyage would do more for me than fifty cycling tours."

“ I’m not thinking of you. I’m thinking of myself.”

The young man burst into a laugh.

“ All right, I’ll come.”

A moment later they were driving towards Cook’s office in Ludgate Circus.

CHAPTER X

THE DEED IN THE BOX

MRS. KEMYS was as deeply occupied with the problems of feeding and clothing her household as the humblest of her neighbours, and the arrival of the postbag found her busily weighing out groceries in her store-room, and putting by the eggs which had just been brought in from the poultry yard.

"My dear, what is it?" she said as Sophy burst in upon her.

"The letters, Mamma, and it's Courtenay's day for writing to me. Do please open the bag."

Courtenay was Sophy's favourite brother, and he confided especially in her as Rodric confided in Annie. The expected letter was forthcoming, and Sophy sat down upon a wooden grocery case, and opened it eagerly.

Mrs. Kemys read her husband's letter, folded it nervously, and put it into her pocket.

"I hope Mr. Richard's well, ma'am. When he went away I fancied he looked as though the accident had shaken him more than he knew," said the inquisitive Sharman.

"He's quite well," said Mrs. Kemys absently. "But he will not be coming back just yet."

"Then I do think we might do the study," said Sharman thoughtfully. "It's not had a turn-out since last he went to town, and the housemaid says the shelves and all are in a dreadful state."

Mrs. Kemys roused herself. "Of course it ought to be done. If we can make sure of putting everything back exactly as it is."

"You leave that to me, ma'am, and don't get troubling yourself. Miss Sophy, you ought to take care of your Mamma. She's looked wore out these last days worrying over Miss Annie. Why don't you make her go out this lovely morning? I'll see to Gwenny doing the study, and under my own eye shall it be done this very morning."

"When does Mamma ever listen to me?" said Sophy, shrugging her shoulders. "But the boys will be back next week, and she listens to them. You had better talk to them, Sharman."

Mrs. Kemys smiled, but rather absently. Her hands were still busying themselves among the shelves of the store-room, but her mind was busy in another direction.

"That is all," she said in a tone of relief, as Sharman departed laden with jars and packages. "Sophy dear, I think I will go out, as Sharman suggests, for I have a headache. I'll do the flowers this morning for you."

"Oh thank you, Mamma, and I can get on with Annie's wrapper," said Sophy, but she lingered.

"Mamma, about Courtenay —"

"What about Courtenay?"

"I'm not sure I'm at liberty to tell — but — oh Mamma, he's in a little scrape. I don't mean anything serious, but he has got into debt — I don't think it's much," said Sophy, frightened by the pallor of her mother's face.

"Not much," said Mrs. Kemys, rather bitterly.

"No, it's not much. Only he's been ordering books — that he wanted, and — and one or two engravings for his rooms."

"Books and engravings," sighed Mrs. Kemys, between relief and dismay, "foolish boy."

"I don't see that he's so foolish," said Sophy rather rebelliously. "He must have books. And if the engravings weren't exactly necessary, he says they inspire him to write — but I forgot, you know nothing of his writings. He tells no one but me. I am only telling it in the strictest confidence," Sophy said, looking alarmed, but her mother paid but scant attention to this revelation.

"If he has bills he can't pay — and how can he pay them? if he has debts, they will certainly come to your father's ears, and he will be taken away from Oxford," she said wearily. "I thought better of Courtenay."

"If it had been Roddy, no one would have said anything," said Sophy, in rather jealous tones. "Oh Mamma he says it is only a little — a very little, that would make things all right to go on with, and he never asks for anything as a rule."

"I am just as able to help him a little as a great deal," said her mother. Then as Sophy was going reluctantly away, she bethought herself with a start of her husband's letter, and she said hurriedly, "Tell him I may be able to do something — I'm not certain — but it is just possible. I will write in a day or two, before he comes home. Don't let the poor boy despair. After all, as you say, he asks so seldom."

"Oh, thank you, Mamma."

A very little hope sufficed to raise Sophy's spirits; she went down the long stone corridor from the store-room singing cheerfully. An inclination to sing had seized many members of the squire's household since his departure. The little boys were shouting joyfully and chasing each other noisily on the nursery floor. A door banged occasionally, and old Pryse could be heard whistling in the pantry whenever the green baize door opened and shut to let anyone through to the back premises. An indescribable relief pervaded the atmosphere of the old house.

Mrs. Kemys took her shady hat from the peg whereon it hung, and lifted her garden gloves and basket and scissors from the lid of the old chest, where lay in rows the master's riding and driving gloves. Then she slipped on her overshoes and went out into the sunshine across the dewy lawn and wet gravel paths.

After a night's rain the sun was shining in a clear

blue sky; the concert of the birds among the budding branches of the forest trees in the shrubberies, was almost deafening; here and there a wet glistening larch stood forth among the brown, gaily arrayed in palest and freshest green; a thousand diamonds glittered on the drooping fairy sprays of the delicate birch.

The foliage of an evergreen rose scattered a shower of dew over her as she pushed open the rickety door of the kitchen garden.

The dazzling white bloom of the "Snow on the mountain" clothed the ridge of the old grey stone walls, and in the sunny sheltered enclosure fluttered a peacock butterfly and a yellow rival as gaily as though summer had already arrived. Beside the door a big bush of flowering currant drooped a thousand rose-pink bunches of blossom. The waxen red bloom of the peach alternated with the thick white blossom of greengages, and through the crossing of the gnarled branches on the loosely-mortared stone background, little ferns thrust themselves.

It was because Richard was not returning immediately that Mrs. Kemys could permit herself the pleasure of cutting a few white hyacinths from the rows of stately spikes in the border below the greenhouse.

She gathered jonquils and narcissus and tall rushes for the vases in the morning-room, and stole a few of the tulips whose brilliant ragged petals were just bursting from their green sheath.

She had a headache from two almost sleepless nights, during which she had revolved incessantly in her mind the question of Annie's visit to Artramont; — and until the arrival of her husband's letter this morning she had felt herself unable to come to any decision.

Annie's pleading words had rung in her ears.

"Couldn't you make it happen? — If you only had the courage!"

With the possibility of Richard's immediate return Annette could not find the courage of which she had boasted to her mother-in-law.

But now —

Annette was startled by the news in her husband's letter of his contemplated voyage to New Zealand. She knew him so well that she understood instantly that he would not have mentioned the possibility to her at all unless he had made up his mind to go. It never occurred to her that his health could have anything to do with such a decision.

He was not given to explaining the affairs of his business to her, and she knew of no reason why they should not take him to New Zealand as easily as keep him in London.

Her mind was so full of Annie, and the opportunities that seemed opening before her child, that she dwelt scarcely at all upon the difference that her husband's prolonged absence might make to her own life.

During the whole period of their married life, he

had seldom spent more than two or three weeks consecutively away from his home, at irregular intervals which had latterly become less and less frequent, and only when compelled to do so by the exigencies of business.

The exception had been shortly after their marriage, when she had understood vaguely that his affairs were passing through a crisis, which necessitated a journey to Sweden, where his partner resided, and a prolonged stay in that country.

But this was over twenty years ago, and now the prospect to her of being left in sole charge of her home and family, without her masterful mate to direct all her affairs was novel indeed.

Yet she scarcely glanced at it in her absorbing anxiety over the one question; dared she take the risk of his possible, nay, his probable, return to take leave of his family, and permit Annie to accept Lady Yorath's invitation? The very thought turned her cold with apprehension.

Oh, if he were gone — and the account of which he spoke actually opened at the bank of Llys dinam — so that she could get poor Annie some decent things — she thought, with beating heart and throbbing brow.

The thatched roof of her mother-in-law's cottage, with its thin line of white smoke rising against the blue background of hills — was visible above the far wall of the kitchen garden.

Mrs. Kemys looked at the scented burden she carried, and decided that her mother-in-law ought to share the spoils of her raid on Richard's sacred borders, though she smiled ruefully at her own weakness in making the excuse even to herself.

But self-reproach was dispelled by the eager delight and relief on the old lady's face, as the lowly door of her little domain was opened to admit Annette, who now appeared smiling, under the budding lilacs, and bade her good morning.

Old Mrs. Kemys was seated in her wheel-chair, in the full blaze of the spring sunshine, which illuminated the thousand wrinkles of her clear-skinned fine-featured old face, though the mushroom hat of the old-fashioned country lady shaded her keen blue eyes.

Her knitting, her *Daily Mail*, her basket of letters and gay-coloured wools and odds and ends, lay beside her as usual, upon a small table, with her writing-case and spectacles; and her white cat was stretching itself lazily beside her footstool.

"Oh, my dear, come in!" she said in glad tones. "I have scarcely been able to sleep for wondering what you had decided to do, and whether you have heard from Richard."

A certain wifely jealousy prevented Annette from actually showing her husband's letter to his mother; she read aloud the whole of the contents, but kept the beginning and the ending to herself, ashamed of

his coldness and secretly resentful; yet trying to maintain a pitiful illusion of sacred marital endearments which must not be spoken aloud.

Richard knew nothing of the curious truth that a woman does not resent selfish or even brutal treatment from the man she loves as she resents cold or slighting words; which is also perhaps the reason why she is so often indifferent to the plain-spoken man of worth, and so easily charmed by the smooth-tongued villain. Annette would have remained almost unconscious of her husband's faults if he had not grudged her the occasional caress of look or speech which her soul craved.

"He means to go," said old Mrs. Kemys, breathless and emphatic. Her face lit up, and her eyes danced so that it appeared as though her rheumatism would hardly prevent her from jumping out of her chair.

"I am sure he means to go," said Annette.

"Well," said the old lady, excitedly, "your course is very clear."

"Do you think we can risk it?" said Annette doubtfully, and her light blue eyes wandered uncertainly from her mother-in-law's eager face to the cottage windows, where the birds were quarrelling loudly under the eaves.

"It would be very absurd to risk anything when there is the faintest chance of his returning and spoiling it all," said the old lady. "You must drive to

Llysdinam, and explain to Annie that there's no possibility of letting her go to Artramont until she has some proper clothes to go in, and that you are ordering them at once,"

"Dear Granny!"

"At once," said Mrs. Kemys obstinately. "The dressmakers in Llysdinam are not up to much, but they are better than nothing, and no one knows better than you what a girl needs for visiting a fashionable country house. And—and you can have everything put down to me, my dear."

"Dear Granny, you can't afford it."

"On such an occasion as this I should not hesitate to run into debt if need be," said the old lady, pursing up her lips and tossing her head. "Pray has Richard not got my bit of capital? If I died he'd have to pay." Her chuckle was an exact replica of her son's. "If I don't die I shall pay it off in time; or you will have to screw something out of the household accounts while he's gone, my love."

"I'll do that," said Annette, between smiles and tears. "She won't need so much, poor child, but the little will make all the difference. If only my Annie were getting her little chance of—of happiness, I could better bear the trouble about poor Roddy, but if Richard does return—he will expect to find her at home and be so indignant that she has not left the hospital —"

"Richard will just be disappointed for once then," said the old lady, sharply. "You will say she's not

well enough to be moved, and she will say the same. He *can't* insist. Not that it signifies, for I am persuaded in my own mind that he won't come home to say goodbye at all. If he's made up his mind to go, he'll go without a moment's delay. I know him."

The event proved that his mother did know Richard Kemys.

Annette drove into Llysdinam that afternoon, and saw her daughter, and whispered her hopes that the visit to Artramont might yet be arranged if she would be good and patient, and agree to remain a little longer in the hospital.

Annie declared herself only too anxious to remain; with such a hope to sustain her, and the visits of Lady Yorath and the enquiries of Lady Yorath's son to cheer her, she was enjoying herself in spite of her broken arm and bruised side; the nurses sang the praises of their patient to her mother, and everyone was agreed that Annie should remain where she was for the present.

With a mind relieved, Mrs. Kemys drove into Llysdinam town, and busied herself in fulfilling the commissions of her mother-in-law. There was not much, as the old lady had said, in the way of fashion to be bought in Llysdinam, but she ordered a few things, with a due regard for economy, and again told herself with a sigh that they were better than nothing.

Sophy and the little boys were awaiting her return eagerly.

"There's a telegram for you, Mamma. I very nearly opened it, but Pryse was so cross, and said you might be home any minute."

"He said Sophy was always meddling," cried Manuel.

"Shut up," said Corney.

A telegram.

Mrs. Kemys was out of the carriage instantly, kissing the little boys hurriedly, and following Sophy into the dark, oak-walled hall.

She read her telegram twice before she spoke again. The relief was so great that the tears came to her eyes and her own voice trembled.

"Sailing Saturday S. S. Tongariro am writing Kemys."

"Oh children! Papa is going away for a long, long time," she said, and sat down in the chair by the hall-table.

The unthinking Manuel was bursting into a shrill hurrah when his brother stopped him with a ready shove. Corney would have cheered more loudly than Manuel had it not been for the tears in his mother's eyes. As it was he stood by her puzzled yet sympathetic, with a sturdy grubby hand upon her knee, waiting for an explanation.

Sophy was quite as much puzzled as Corney. She could not believe her mother was crying merely

because her father was going away. Sophy's agile imagination flew from one cause to another. Child-like, she figured to herself every possible catastrophe with perfect calm.

Why should her father be going away for a long, long time? Had he perhaps committed some crime — killed somebody in a fit of temper, as old Pryse had often said would be the end of it all, and was he flying from justice?

Was he about to desert his wife and family as Merthyr Williams in the village had deserted his, leaving them on the parish? The explanation that Papa was going to establish a branch of his business in New Zealand was so prosaic that Sophy felt disappointment mingled with her relief. But she also felt that the cause of her mother's tears was still unexplained.

"You can take the telegram to Granny, Sophy, and say I will go and sit with her this evening," said Mrs. Kemys, "and now I will have some tea, and rest myself, for I am very tired, and Corney and Manuel shall keep me company."

The little boys followed her gladly into the drawing-room; and Manuel climbed on to the sofa next her, and laid his flaxen head fondly against her shoulder, embracing her with both his thin little jersey-clad arms.

Corney stood beside the tea-table, watching her, with those honest puzzled blue eyes, set in the strong

handsome little face that was like his father's with the evil, as it were, left out.

But he did not ask her why she cried, though his mind was as speculative on the subject as Sophy's had been, until the appearance of a plate of hot cakes brought in with the urn put his mother's tears and everything else out of his head.

When Sophy returned breathless from her hasty expedition to the cottage (though she had managed to spread the news through the house and garden on her way), she could not help thinking that already the evidences of her father's absence abounded.

Had the squire been at home, nay had he been even uncertainly expected, the cook would not have baked those cakes; Pryse would not have brought them in smiling with pleasure because he knew how surprised and delighted the little boys would be: Corney would not have been sitting cross-legged on the floor enjoying his tea, and occasionally sharing it with the puppy, and Manuel would not have been lying on the sofa, within the protecting circle of his mother's arm.

By this time Mrs. Kemys was smiling, even laughing, at the conversation of the little boys, and Sophy began almost to suspect that her grief must have been assumed for their benefit, so that she could not help saying with some emphasis:

"Well, *Granny* is delighted. She does not *pretend* to be upset at Papa's going, she only says it will

do him a lot of good, and that she has always longed to see a branch of the business established in New Zealand above everything else in the world. I never saw her so pleased about anything. She really chuckled."

The letter that came from Richard Kemys next morning was, as he had foretold, a hurried one; but it gave particulars of his projected trip, though it made no mention of the travelling companion he had selected. He would go via Plymouth, Teneriffe, Cape Town and Hobart, he explained, and probably return by Rio. This part of his letter rather puzzled Mrs. Kemys and would have puzzled her more had not other matters driven the subject from her mind. Why should Richard trouble to explain the why and the wherefore of the route he had chosen to his wife, who was ignorant of all routes? He never troubled to explain anything to her, and loved to keep her as much in the dark as he could concerning his hopes and his plans. She did not perceive that it was his fear lest she should insist upon coming to bid him farewell that made Richard descant upon the advantages of the route he had chosen, which obliged him to start without any delay, so that during the short time remaining to him he must be overwhelmed with business.

The thought of Annie, and the relief and thankfulness which possessed her overwhelmed all other feelings until she read on, and learnt that the will had

already been executed which would disinherit Rodric and put little Corney in his place.

“Without giving my boy a chance, without giving me a chance to talk him over and coax him if needs be to abandon the idea,” she cried, reading Richard’s curt announcement over and over, while her face burnt and her hands trembled with helpless indignation. “It is all very well for Granny to say there is plenty of time for him to make a hundred wills and alter all his plans over and over again,—but after all, even Richard is not immortal,” said Annette, with a sob, “though God forbid that he should die with such an injustice on his soul. And my boy that loves every stick and stone about the place which is his lawful inheritance. But what can I do. Oh Roddy, Roddy, that I should see it all taken from you, my darling, and be powerless to help. But what I can do I will. I will write to Richard and perhaps, God knows — his heart may be softer when he is going so far away from us all, and without even a word of goodbye. Though that is better than if he left with the memory of hard words — to haunt him on his journey.”

Her courage was high and her indignation hot when she sat down to write, but as she wrote gentleness overcame wrath, and her letter ended in words of love and pleading, and was blotted with many tears.

“ . . . For the sake of the love you once bore me, and I know that you love me still in your heart,

though like the weeds in the parable, the love of money and your impatience with my many weaknesses have come between us."

Poor Annette knew vaguely that her involved sentences and feeble diction incensed her husband, who wrote a clerkly hand and prided himself upon his conciseness. But she wrote in passionate earnestness and trembled as she wrote, praying that she might be given words wherewith to touch his heart. "*Do not go so far away from us all with this on your conscience, and wrong your own son, whom you loved once when he was little. Even if he has not grown up to be all you would wish him to be, look round the county and see who has a son of whom parents could have a right to be prouder than we of Roddy.*" (She thought of Lord Yorath and her conscience pricked her, but she hurried on.) "*He is big and handsome and healthy and steady, and has never been an undutiful son even if he is a little self-willed at times. How can you and I expect him to be without faults when we are so far from faultless ourselves? He may not be so clever as you are in business, but you know, dear Richard that you are one in a thousand for that, and if you did so well through leaving home early and becoming independent, why should not you give him the chance to do the same. You do not like his interfering or showing too much interest in Nantgwilt, though he loves the place with all his heart; and he does not like being in London; would it not be better therefore that he should go*

away altogether? If you would think it over you must know it would be better. I ask you solemnly — your poor wife asks you on her knees to listen to her this once. Oh Richard, you haven't forgotten — though I have never, never spoken of it till now, that I broke my father's heart for your sake, clinging to you though he begged me not, and said hard things of you, and only let me go because I told him I would come to you whether or not. I loved you so that all his years of devotion and care seemed as nothing beside my love for you, but God knows whether I have wondered at my heart being once so hard for him that saw you would be some day as hard for me, only I would not believe it then. Oh Richard, don't let it be true. Do you remember the first time I saw you really angry, and how frightened I was at you, and how bitterly I cried? And you asked me to forgive you the night Roddy was born; when my suffering melted your heart so that I think you suffered more than I did; for your gentleness made me so happy and oh how happy I was to forgive you — everything. Don't you remember how proud I was because I thought he was going to be big and strong like you instead of weak and delicate like me. Dear Richard, I will tell you now what I have never told you or anyone, that Roddy is the dearest to me of all my children, and that it is because of that night he is so dear. Oh for the sake of those days listen to me now, and if this letter angers you which I have written from my heart as I can no longer speak to

you without angering you — then put it aside now and read it only when you are far away, out at sea, with none of my foolishness to vex you and only the memory of all we have been through together and those happy, happy days of our youth, to make you feel more kindly towards me than you have done — lately. Oh, Richard, be good to me, and listen, and do justice to your son, as your father did to you, that your children may honour your memory as his memory is honoured, and I will thank you and bless you for ever and ever. Your wife, who never has loved and never will love any man but you.

“ANNETTE KEMYS.”

The pretty red-cheeked Welsh housemaid came into the drawing-room as Mrs. Kemys closed and sealed her letter. Her dark eyes were round and frightened.

“I have had an accident in the master’s study, ma’am.”

“Oh, Gwenny, what have you broken?”

“It wasn’t me.” Gwenny’s lips trembled, but neither the mistress nor the maid were as aghast as they would have been had the squire been at home. “I don’t know whateffer Mrs. Sharman will say,” murmured Gwenny. “She wasn’t gone a minute when it happened. I was on the ladder, bringing down the things on the top of the book-case, and I lifted a square leather-covered box by the handle and it came out of the setting and the box fell on the

floor and bursted herself, and all the papers fell out."

Big tears welled into the dark eyes, and trickled down the shining red cheeks. Mrs. Kemys thought of the scolding volubility of Sharman, and was moved to compassion.

"It was very right of you to come and tell me at once, Gwenny," she said kindly, "and as you've told me perhaps we needn't tell Mrs. Sharman. I'll come and see what box it is, and get it mended before the squire comes home."

Gwenny gathered together the fallen documents, heaped them into the well of the shabby despatch-box, picked up the lid to which one useless hinge adhered by a single screw loosely holding to rotten wood,—and gave the whole into her lady's keeping, with a grateful heart and beaming smile of relief and thanks.

Mrs. Kemys hurried back to the drawing-room with her burden, to be out of Sharman's way.

"No wonder the lock burst," she thought, as she fitted and refitted the bundles of old deeds and filed accounts into the old desk, and endeavoured to replace the lid. "Only by main force could it have been shut upon such closely-packed contents, and the wood is quite rotten." She saw by the initials that the despatch-box had belonged to the miser Cornelius. "It must be over a hundred years old."

The documents appeared to be of much more recent date, and as she was laying the last upon the top of the others, she was attracted by her own name.

The blue envelope was addressed in Richard's clean writing to herself, and twice over.

*For my wife only,
To Mrs. Richard C. Kemys.*

On the impulse of the moment Annette opened the envelope, and a half sheet of paper fluttered on to the carpet, as she drew forth a thin folded parchment deed.

The parchment opened stiffly, as though it had lain untouched for many years.

She lifted the paper from the carpet and read a pencilled note in Richard's hand.

Private.

To Nan. In case of my death destroy this document at once. Rex.

She remembered now.

The two little names, long disused between them, lay before her as relics of past happiness.

Just before their marriage they had read over that deed together, and with his rough face pressed against her soft cheek, he had explained it eagerly, as though seeming afraid there might be something in it which she would — might want to mention to her father — who knew nothing of business; who was not to see it; and she had wondered greatly and said, still wondering —

“But, Rex, I trust *you* with all my heart and soul,” and he had kissed her exultingly and said he knew it, and that he believed she would always do

what he bade her against all the world, and she had laughed, always wondering that he could have doubted it, and said "Of course."

It all came back to her very vividly as she sat there, holding the paper and looking at the parchment. Only she thought the deed had been destroyed long ago. He had surely given her to understand it would be destroyed, and that only he and she and the lawyer who drew it up would ever know of its existence.

A thought suddenly entered her mind which made her heart beat faster, and brought the blood to her pale cheeks, so that they burnt with a deep red flush.

Since the deed had not been destroyed, since she had it here, safely in her own possession,—surely if she chose to act upon it, to defy Richard — her heart whispered, to betray him — surely, she held him now, in the hollow of her hand.

CHAPTER XI

MR. TURLEY IN HIS OFFICE

WHEN old Mr. Turley heard that Mrs. Kemys the younger wished to see him, he supposed that she must have brought him some urgent message from her mother-in-law, whose trustee and adviser he was. In some curiosity, though also with a little stiffness, he gave the desired permission for her entry, and rose to greet her as she was ushered into his office.

Mrs. Richard Kemys had been little Annette to him once, and as a child had sat upon his knee, and played with his bunch of seals, while he talked to her father over her golden head. But when she grew up and married and he quarrelled with Richard Kemys, as everyone quarrelled sooner or later with the Squire of Nantgwilt, he had met her rarely, save in the cottage of her mother-in-law, who insisted upon seeing her late husband's adviser as often as she chose, and with whose wishes on this point Richard Kemys had apparently not cared to interfere.

Mr. Turley knew very well that Annette avoided him because she dared not be friendly, though she would not deny him a sorrowful smile, or half-frightened word of greeting, even in Richard's presence. For his part he was only too willing to serve her,

but he knew that he served her best by keeping out of her way.

Yet as she entered the little office which had once been a familiar place to her, he was moved to some emotion; and he perceived that she was both embarrassed and troubled, and perhaps a little ashamed.

"Mr. Turley," she said, faltering, "I have no right to come, I know, after the way in which Richard has behaved to you. But you must have known that — that it was not altogether my fault, only my misfortune" — she smiled faintly — "that I have been able to see you so seldom. And you are the only one left of my father's old friends, to whom I could come for advice on a difficult matter."

He stepped forward and took the hands she held out almost imploringly towards him.

"My dear, you are welcome as flowers in May, as welcome as you always were in this dingy old place," he said. "Come, come, you must not be upset, you've inherited a right to come here when you choose, you know! You're at home. Why, there's the corner cupboard where the madeira and the seed cake live that you once called the widow's cruse, because the decanter and the dish were never empty. You used to make faces when your father let you sip his madeira, but you won't despise it now, eh? You'll please me by taking a little — for you're pale and tired after your long drive."

The old man filled a glass, and set it before her, and cut the perennial seed-cake with such delight that

she could not refuse to gratify him by accepting the refreshment he offered.

He declined, he said, to hear a word about business until she had done justice to the little feast he set before her, and he sat and chatted to her, recalling trivial incidents of her visits during her childhood, with an old man's pleasure in such reminiscences.

But he could not help wondering, even during the light discourse with which he endeavoured to restore her composure, whether she had come to tell him that she could no longer endure life with Richard Kemys, and to ask him to aid her to obtain a separation from him.

His feelings of resentment against his ex-client gathered strength as he looked at Annette; involuntarily contrasting her as she was with his vivid memory of what she had been when she last entered his office at the time of her marriage. To the old lawyer the vision of the bright, delicate, spiritual face of the maiden Annette was more real than the actual living presence before him, which he regarded almost as the ghost of his old friend's beloved child. To him she was a pathetic figure, as she sat beside his office table in her shabby gown and bonnet, nervously crumbling the cake she did not want; looking at him with sad blue eyes from which the colour seemed half washed away by the shedding of many tears; and trying to smile at him though he knew well that she was on the verge of weeping.

Mrs. Kemys perceived very few changes in the little dingy room she remembered so well.

There were the tin boxes with their white letterings which had once filled her with such awe. One, conspicuously worded, "*Executors of the Right Hon. Baron Yorath, deceased,*" caught her eyes.

A case of stuffed humming birds decorated the mantelpiece; they had been a present from her father to old Turley in the days when such things were deemed ornamental.

The solitary innovation appeared to be the telephone, for she was sure the woven wire blind which hid the lower portion of the window was the identical one she remembered, and that the curtains were of the original pattern.

Mr. Turley himself had changed as little as his surroundings during the past two and twenty years. He was perhaps rather balder at seventy-two than he had been at fifty; a little more shrunken about the shanks and rounder about the shoulders.

But he wore the same shrewd smiling expression, the same gold-rimmed pince-nez (though doubtless the glasses they contained were stronger ones) and the same neat grey whiskers brushed forward to give more width to his narrow jaw.

"Now," he said, settling himself into the elbow-chair before his writing-table, and preparing to give his full attention to business.

She laid a folded parchment before him.

"Before you read this I want to explain."

"Yes."

She clasped her thin hands, and tried to collect her thoughts, and to speak concisely and clearly; but the quick beating of her heart made her speech hurried and breathless in spite of herself.

"Richard — my husband — is obliged to go to New Zealand on business, unexpectedly —" Mr. Turley's surprise was audible. "Yes — it is very sudden — he only made up his mind a day or two ago — and he is sailing to-day."

She paused, trying to still her hurrying breath; and the old man fixed his eyes on the blotting paper, making invisible marks with the wrong end of a pencil, and waiting until she should have composed herself.

"In the meantime," said Annette, "he fancies he has cause to be displeased with our eldest boy — with Roddy —"

As though the mention of her son's name gave her courage, she gathered strength and energy in her recital and told Mr. Turley of Roddy's wishes and demands, of her husband's determination to disinherit him and put little Corney in his place, and of her own despairing efforts to change that determination, with a simplicity and calm that emphasized the facts.

When she came to the letter she had written to her husband on the previous day, her manner changed: spots of colour burned in the thin cheeks that had been so pale.

"I appealed to him by everything we — I — held

most sacred—to listen to me,” she said, “and though he had already executed the Will—though he is in no way changeable—I believed that he would do so, for I had never made such an appeal to him before—and he was going away—for a long time. You will forgive me for speaking of my feelings—nothing else would explain to you—what I am about to—to—what I want you to help me to do. All last night I lay awake, thinking and thinking, and making up my mind to give him this chance”—his wondering look made her hold up an entreating hand—“Wait, you will understand presently. I thought that he would—that he *must* listen to me. I counted the days that must pass before he could answer my letter, for I knew he would be just starting when he received it. It would be my farewell,—he had not thought of saying any good-bye to me—” There was a faint, very faint flavour of bitterness in her tone. “But I had not to wait for the answer at all; for he telegraphed to me this morning.”

She handed a telegram to Mr. Turley, and he read it.

Received letter: determination unchanged; desire subject dropped; decision final; just off to Docks.
Kemys.

“Nothing I have said has moved him,” Annette went on patiently. “I see now that entreaty and ar-

guments are quite useless. I suppose I must have known it in my heart all the time. But I wanted to give him the chance. I would not have come to you with *this* — if he had answered otherwise — if he had given me even a little hope.”

She unfolded the deed and put it into Mr. Turley’s hand.

“Yesterday,” said Annette, “one of the maids, turning out Richard’s study, let fall an old despatch-box that stood on the top of the bookcase hidden by piles of blue books and justice’s manuals. It was packed so tightly with deeds and parchments that the lock burst in the fall, and the whole thing practically came to pieces, the wood being dry and old and worm-eaten. In trying to re-pack it I came upon this parchment enclosed in an envelope addressed to myself.”

“You have read it?”

“I have read it several times.”

Mr. Turley studied it carefully for some moments.

“It is dated just before your marriage.”

“Yes,” murmured Annette.

“Drawn up in Machon’s office, evidently. He had only just arrived in Llys dinam then. Here is his name as witness, Habor Machon. It is rather unusually worded.”

“It is so curt that I fancy Richard must have written the original draft himself,” she said, smiling faintly. “He says that solicitors’ wordings are too intricate, and that he prefers something simpler.”

"No one will deny the quality of simplicity to amateur lawyers," said Mr. Turley, drily. "But we have no occasion to complain, for such efforts are apt to double our opportunities for work. Well, well, I should like to see a client of mine dictating terms of deeds for me. Mind, I'm not finding fault with this one," he added cautiously. "At first sight it appears to afford no loophole for dispute, though I am of course not prepared to give my opinion upon it without consideration." He read it through a second time; and Annette waited.

"You understand its purport?" he asked, looking at her over his glasses.

"It was explained to me at the time," she answered, flushing, "but it appears to me to be sufficiently clear in itself to enable anyone to understand it. It is a deed of gift from Richard to me, appointing himself my trustee and giving me Nantgwilt, the house, its contents, the estate, everything — together with a large sum of money, for my own."

"Securities hereinafter mentioned, h'm, h'm, h'm — to the estimated value of £30,000, now deposited in my name at the Bank of England —" muttered Mr. Turley, reading to himself.

"That was it. I know he has always kept a separate account at the Bank of England, apart from Prescott's, where his business account is, or the bank in Llys dinam, on which he draws for all local expenses."

"Who knows of the existence of this deed?"

"I suppose only Mr. Machon and his clerk, besides myself. He may have told Mr. Joavan, his solicitor in London; or John Bond, his manager. I don't know."

"Your father would have told me if —"

"My father was not to know," interposed Annette.

"Can you form any idea why it was made?" said Mr. Turley, looking away from her carefully.

"Yes, I can," said Annette, in a low tone. "It is only an idea, for I know nothing of business."

"May I have it for what it is worth?"

"You know —" she hesitated — "about Richard's business."

"I know very little about it. Something to do with Swedish iron, is it not?"

"Everything to do with it. He got some information on the subject by chance as a lad, which interested him — something about Swedish iron being burnt with charcoal and not with coal, which made it of superior quality. I'm afraid I forget the details. Anyway when his godmother left him a thousand pounds he went to Sweden, persuaded his father to advance him the money, and entered into partnership with a man there for selling imported Swedish iron. The man was only a commission agent, I fancy, but Richard was bold and energetic, and extended their business a great deal. Much later, after he inherited Nantgwilt and during our engagement, he told me that if he had the courage to speculate

in iron instead of merely buying on commission, he believed he could make a fortune. My idea is that he determined to do this, and saw in our marriage an opportunity to make Nantgwilt safe in case he failed. If a man goes bankrupt, his creditors cannot touch his wife's property, can they?"

"It depends. One moment — why did he not put Nantgwilt and the rest into settlement in the ordinary way?"

"Because," said Annette, steadily, "I am certain he meant to destroy this deed if his speculations were successful. Richard was not the man to hand over the powers of disposing of his own property to anyone if he could help it. All his plans were arranged beforehand. He bought out his partner directly after we married, and then waited his opportunity. It came two years later, and I know he went through a very exciting time. He had some great transaction, buying up Swedish iron and selling it to one of the large railway companies. He told me very little, but I remember he could hardly eat or sleep till it was all settled. I do not think he has ever speculated in the same way since. He has his office in King William Street, with John Bond as manager, who had worked for him in quite a humble capacity, but whose ability and trustworthiness he had the good luck to discover. I believe he has prospered, but to what extent I do not know. I have thought sometimes — that he must be very well off," she faltered, "though he is so careful."

Mr. Turley, who had heard Richard Kemys described as the second miser of Nantgwilt, nodded compassionately.

"That is all I know," she said, "or rather, all I have gathered, for most of it is only surmise."

"He never told you — in so many words — that he meant to destroy that deed —?"

She looked at him as though in surprise.

"Richard was much too clever to tell me anything of the kind in words. He told me he was giving me everything he had, in return for my — my giving myself to him in spite of my father's opposition, and to show me he loved me. But that he did not wish my father to know because he was on bad terms with him, and had quarrelled over the marriage settlements."

"You understood it then — how —?"

"Not all at once — only vaguely — gradually — and I had the impression that, after the speculation was safe — he had destroyed the deed. I am sure he told Machon so. I never dreamt of its being otherwise."

"But that is just it. Why did he not destroy it?"

She shrugged her shoulders wearily.

"Why should he trouble to do so? He knew he had only to throw it into the fire, or to bid me throw it into the fire at any moment. He thought it was certain to be destroyed by me if he died first —" her lip quivered, "and meantime there it

was — safe — a loophole of escape if anything went wrong with the business.”

“And now, you will not throw it into the fire — even at his bidding,” said Mr. Turley slowly.

“I want to — to put it out of my own power to do so,” she said, with white lips, and scarcely above a whisper. “I am going to — to find courage to defy Richard — to — to betray his absolute confidence in me — for — for his own sake, for my boy’s sake, for the sake of all our children. That is why I have come to you. First to ask you to tell me — if the deed will — will hold good — whether it is well and truly executed, don’t they say? Oh, I don’t expect you to answer me off-hand. I know that is not the way with lawyers. You will have to study it and go into the matter, and perhaps go to London and take counsel’s opinion? I do not suppose it will be easy to — to settle such a question at once, and even if it were, there will be difficulties. No one, to my knowledge, has ever got the better of Richard.”

“If you will give me leave — I think I will get the better of him this time,” said Mr. Turley, grimly.

He looked at the parchment, and a smile stole over his face. “I don’t think they will find it easy to get out of this. My friend Machon is a better lawyer than I suspected,” he said with twinkling eyes.

“Then you think —?” she said breathlessly.

But Mr. Turley would not say what he thought, in a word. He uttered a short discourse upon the sub-

ject of bona fide transactions, which he made particularly elaborate because he knew that it is always safest in business matters to assume that every woman is a fool; and Mrs. Kemys listened attentively, because she knew that if she wanted to learn something from him presently that she did not know she must listen patiently to many things that she did.

"Then even if — if there were some difficulty in establishing the deed, there would be matter in it for a fight in the law-courts?"

"Most certainly — if he were fool enough to let such a deed, made for such a purpose, be brought to light in such a manner, which I am very sure he would not be," said Mr. Turley.

"But with that deed in your hand — if — if I gave you a power of attorney or whatever is necessary — you could fight Richard on my behalf?"

"Without it —" he cried.

"No, no. I must put it all into your hands so that it is beyond my power to recall it," she said nervously. "It sounds easy to say *fight Richard* now, but when he comes home I shall never have courage unless I put it out of my own power to draw back."

"I understand," he said soothingly.

"I want it established," she said breathlessly, "if it is possible to establish it, so that Richard's will, the unjust will he has made —"

"Will be waste paper," said Mr. Turley, nodding, "so far as Nantgwilt is concerned. He can-

not will away what does not belong to him, of course."

"So that if he died on the voyage — which God forbid," she said, and looked at him in a kind of horror at the very sound of the words, "my boy's inheritance would be safe."

"If we establish this, Nantgwilt belongs to you; you could do what you chose with it."

"Mr. Turley, will you draw up a will for me to sign at once; leaving it to Roddy, or the eldest surviving son — as it would go by entail in fact. Then, if Richard kills me when he comes home, it will not so much matter." She said, with her faint smile.

"Come, come, come," said Mr. Turley, soothingly. "It will not be so bad as that. Though I have no doubt he will be very angry."

"He will have a right to be angry. Do you think I don't feel, in every fibre of my being — that I am playing him false, I whom he trusted — who have stood by him always against every one, against my own father," she said passionately. "Don't you understand I know what everyone thinks of Richard — how many enemies he has who would rejoice to see him outwitted. It is just that — that I have always felt he had no one but me — that he stands alone — that has made me able —" The words she left unsaid were the most eloquent, as she turned her sad eyes upon her father's old friend.

"If he stands alone," muttered Mr. Turley, "it is his own fault."

"That makes it the sadder," she said, patiently. "Always he has suspected everyone and trusted only himself — and me. Even his manager and old Jovan, whose integrity is tried — he boasts that he has so arranged matters that they check each other and are both checked by him. Always he has seen, as it were, the whole world against him; but that I am on his side he has never been able to doubt. And now I have deserted him. And I don't know how I have made up my mind to do this thing," she said, and hid her face in her hands for a moment. "I boasted," she said faintly, "that if God would give me the opportunity, I would find the courage. But it is harder than I thought, though it is for the children's sake, Roddy's — and — and Annie's —"

"Annie's!" he cried.

"Annie's too. Oh, never mind why, I can't explain," she said hurriedly. "Mr. Turley, could I not raise some money on the strength of that deed?"

"Certainly you could," he said promptly. And then chuckled.

"I think Mr. Richard would pay a very large sum of money to get it back," said Mr. Turley.

"But it is now — now that I want it," she said, almost wildly. "There is my boy to be started, and his outfit, and — and other things. If you could advance me some money now — a great deal, two or three hundred pounds; and a thousand when my boy sails for the Argentine, on the security of the deed. After that there could be no drawing back,"

she said, laughing nervously. "You will think me grasping, but if you knew how badly I want money now — at this moment."

"My dear," he said, with tears in his small, shrewd eyes, "you need not have waited to find the deed to come and ask your father's old friend for that."

CHAPTER XII

ANNETTE IN LONDON

ON Sunday afternoon it was the family custom for old Mrs. Kemys to be wheeled across to the Manor House, where she met Mrs. Byewater and her two daughters and Mr. Meredydd; tea was carried out onto the lawn, if the weather permitted, and if not, spread upon the round table in the dark oak-walled drawing-room.

Nobody was very fond of old Mrs. Byewater; but as though in compensation she was very fond of herself; and never tired of discussing this most interesting subject.

She presented rather a pathetic figure; a travesty of good looks long past; with her small tight-laced person, elaborate golden coiffure that scarcely disguised her own grey hair; a smart girlish frock that would not have ill-become Sophy's trim and youthful form, and pointed shoes which caused her to hobble rather than walk. Her old wrinkled face peered forth beneath the narrow brim of a flowery hat, like the sad wizened countenance of a monkey; and her incessant chattering and grimacing served but to heighten the resemblance.

But the pathos was lost upon her neighbours at

Nantgwilt, who had borne her airs and graces so long that they found them frankly insufferable, and were bored instead of touched by her idiosyncrasies.

The devotion of her two elderly daughters, however, roused a never-ending wonder and admiration. No one knew Mrs. Byewater's age, but it was believed that she had married comparatively late in life, and nothing could be more obvious than that Miss Cynthia and Miss Perina had passed their half-century. Mrs. Byewater, however, had scarcely observed that her daughters were grown up, far less that they had grown old.

They had spent their childhood, she informed everyone, at Cheltenham. Being left a widow, she had brought them to the Red House at Llanon, twenty years ago, when the death of Colonel Myllon had left the place vacant. She talked as though her children had grown up in the village, and the villagers were tired of reminding each other that the young ladies must have been well over thirty when they first appeared upon the scene. It was too old a pleasantry to amuse anyone. There was a genuine respect for the spinster sisters, though they always seemed to be a little unhappy and out of their element in Llanon, and were understood to regret Cheltenham. However, they occupied themselves to the best of their ability, were kind to their poorer neighbours in an unobtrusive way, worked in their garden, decorated the church at the proper seasons, and sang in the choir to the distraction of the con-

gregation, who being partly Welsh were wholly musical.

The weather was not particularly warm upon this occasion, but the party assembled nevertheless upon the lawn beneath the lofty spreading branches of the mighty cedar that was its chief ornament, for all were accustomed to an outdoor life; and the garden was a sheltered one.

Old Mrs. Kemys wore her lilac bonnet in deference to the day, and because it always replaced her best winter poke at this season of the year, though it was as much less comfortable as it was more elegant. But her fine waxen skin and clear eyes were very well able to bear exposure to the searching light of the spring day. In her soft white cashmere shawl wrapped about her plain old-fashioned gown of plum-coloured silk, she presented a dignified contrast to the tiny over-dressed bejewelled old lady perched on the opposite garden seat.

"We used to say nothing ever happened in Llanon," Miss Cynthia remarked to Sophy. "But it has been a very exciting week for you all. What with the accident, and Annie's broken arm, and her being laid up in the hospital."

"And now Mr. Kemys going off to New Zealand at a moment's notice," said Mrs. Byewater, giggling and fingering a long string of doubtful pearls. "I should think you must be quite bewildered, dear Annette; for the suddenness of his departure was a

shock even to poor little me, whom he scarcely vouchsafed to notice."

"Yes, it was a surprise," said Annette, rather absently, as she busied herself over the tea-table.

"It was unlucky he had to start before Easter," said old Mrs. Kemys cheerfully. "For now he will miss the boys; and Roddy will of course be settled in the Argentine before his father returns."

Old Mrs. Kemys often told her daughter-in-law that frankness best disarmed the curiosity of their neighbours.

"And how does he like the notion of Roddy's going off like this?" said Mrs. Byewater, peering inquisitively forward.

"I don't suppose he liked it particularly. Neither of us could like his going so far away," said Annette, grateful for the alacrity with which Mr. Meredydd came to her assistance.

"Like it! I'm lamenting from morning till night. But we must all give way to the young, you know," said the rector. "We are tied to the earth, and they soar far above us in their ambitions and their aspirations. Well, well — they generally knock their heads against the stars and come tumbling down to our level again in the end. I hope the rheumatism is better, Mrs. Kemys?" he ended abruptly.

"It is troubling me less now that the spring warmth has got into the air," said the old lady.

"I should have said I had had a better night than usual for I slept till I was called; only that, unluckily, I dreamt I was awake, and so got no benefit at all."

"Oh Granny, Howell says you sleep much more than you think. Perhaps you often dream you are awake when you are really asleep," cried Sophy mischievously.

"Howell talks nonsense, my love, and so do you."

"It must be dreadful to have rheumatism," said the poor little valiant combatant of relentless Time, whose fingers were crippled and twisted with another form of the complaint, as everyone present knew very well. "Cynthia, love, do hold up. Sophy sets you an example."

Miss Cynthia obediently straightened her long drooping figure, clad in a lace and muslin blouse, and bright blue skirt; and ornamented by a tarnished gilt belt and a boa from which the moulting feathers escaped at intervals, floating on to the lawn, or decomposing the rector by settling conspicuously upon his black coat.

"I told you Jack and I were to spend Easter with my sister in Cornwall, did I not?" he asked. "She insists upon it, for it will be her last chance of seeing the boy. She made such a point of it that I was obliged to give in, though I do not like being away at Easter."

He had told them this more than once, but it ap-

peared that he had now an additional announcement to make.

"I had arranged with my old friend, Canon Brettle, to take the duty, but I am sorry to say he can't come. He is laid up with a severe attack of sciatica. He has found a substitute — but that will not be at all the same thing."

"Not at all," said the ladies, in a polite chorus, but their expression became alert. Canon Brettle was an old friend, but the thought of a new face in Llanon was pleasant.

"Do you know who he is — or anything about him?" said Mrs. Kemys, voicing the curiosity of the rest.

"Oh dear yes, he is the brother of the lady who married the Bishop the other day. Cantrill is his name. Oh yes, I have met him; quiet, gentlemanly, middle-aged man; a member of our archæological society. No, he is unmarried. I'm afraid it won't be quite like having dear old Brettle," said the rector, innocently. "However, that he should be a friend of Brettle's says everything in his favour."

"Cantrill is a very odd name," said Miss Perina.

"Perina, dearest, don't talk so loud. I am always telling you," said her mother, in lenient but reproving tones. "Young people get into the habit of shouting as though all their elders were deaf," she chattered, turning with that odd, deprecating, monkey-like smile upon old Mrs. Kemys.

"I cannot say that is my experience," was the dry response. "On the contrary, I am always accusing them of mumbling."

The visitors went away, Sophy and the little boys accompanying them through the house to see them off, while Annette slowly wheeled her mother-in-law's chair through the kitchen garden to the cottage.

The brown earth in the borders, beautifully raked, showed pleasant signs of life, with little green tokens pushing their way through the mould. The baby gooseberries were swelling on bushes hardly yet in leaf, the pear trees were bursting into blossom.

On the surrounding hills, newly whitewashed brown-tiled cottages, each in its little bower of orchard, set against leafless woods, shone in the setting sun. The evening chorus of the birds was almost deafening; untiring little builders darted to and fro among the tall firs, and below the eaves of the woodshed set in the corner of the cottage enclosure, where stacks of fresh-cut fagots lay, and branches ready to support the peas and beans, which were now scarcely three inches high.

"The season is very backward," said old Mrs. Kemys. "I have not heard the cuckoo yet. Thank you, my dear. Will you give me an arm upstairs or shall I call Howell?"

But Howell was on the watch. A straitlaced elderly servant who combined the offices of maid, nurse and cook to her mistress, and who, being con-

scious of her own invaluable services, was not always as entirely respectful as she might have been.

"You're out too late for your rheumatics. I can't think how you expect to get better at this rate. Now we shall be hearing of more bad nights," she said, shaking her head.

"Don't be tiresome, Howell, and shut the door. Mrs. Richard is coming upstairs," said the old lady, sharply.

Howell perceived that the time for remonstrance was not come, so wisely, if crossly, retired to the kitchen.

The old lady settled herself in the usual corner of the little drawing-room, and looked expectantly at her daughter-in-law.

"Dear Granny, you must have thought it strange that I did not come near you yesterday evening — nor this morning. But I could not make up my mind — you know how difficult I always find it to be decided — how much I ought to tell you of all I have been doing."

"Why should you not tell me? You wouldn't surely have the heart to leave me in the dark wondering day and night what you are keeping back?" said the old lady, querulously.

"I do not want Richard to be able to blame *you* when he comes home. If you know nothing he cannot blame you."

"You have done something which will anger him when he comes home?"

"After seeing Annie yesterday morning I called on Mr. Turley."

"You called on Mr. Turley?"

"To ask his advice about — about a discovery I have made."

"A discovery!" said Richard's mother, looking alarmed. "Nothing — nothing disgraceful to Richard?"

"No, no. It is — only a paper — on the strength of which Mr. Turley will advance me as much money as I want at once, in the certainty that Richard will eventually be obliged to repay him."

"Is that all — a paper? I don't want to hear anything about it if that's all, and if it would make it in any way easier for you, as perhaps it might, if I knew nothing. The more discoveries you make of that kind, and the more money Mr. Turley gives you on the strength of those discoveries the better I shall be pleased," said Mrs. Kemys in great relief. "I've always told you I'm certain Richard is rolling in wealth, and hoarding his money like his great-grandfather the miser. It is that which makes his conduct pass my patience. Bless me! Do you mean that old Turley will give you the thousand pounds for Rodric?"

"That, and whatever I want besides; so that I can get all that is wanted for Annie at once, and help Courtenay out of his little difficulties —"

"Courtenay too!"

"Only some trifling foolish debts, but they would

have been made the excuse to take him away from Oxford, where he is doing well, even if he has contracted extravagant tastes according to our ideas. And you know how conscientious the poor boy is —”

“Pig-headed —” said Mrs. Kemys, impartially.

“Well — he would certainly have made a point of confessing his obligations, even at the expense of his career —”

“He would glory in such a sacrifice to his conscience,” said Mrs. Kemys, shrugging her shoulders. “Young people are sad fools, my dear. It’s very aggravating to be obliged to sit still and watch them slowly and obstinately finding out for themselves what we could have told them in a word if they would but listen to us.”

“We were the same in our time. We never listened,” said Annette. “Dear Granny, I can face the crisis in the fates of two of them now. That is something. And I am going to London to-morrow to buy clothes for Annie, and to get a proper outfit for my boy.”

The old lady’s eyes shone.

“You are really plucking up spirit at last,” she said, almost admiringly. “I wish I could come with you and keep up your courage. As it is I shall be trembling till you return, always fancying your resolution has failed and that you are busy cabling confessions to Richard. You do not enjoy outwitting him as I should.”

“No, I do not enjoy it,” said Annette. “Never-

theless I am doing it. But he cannot be home for three or four months, I suppose. Three at least. There is time for a great deal to happen in three months. I must live in the present, and leave the future to take care of itself," she said with a smile.

Annette found herself in London on the Monday evening, but instead of remaining at Paddington as usual, she drove across to Knightsbridge and engaged rooms in a fashionable hotel there close to the shops she intended to visit.

Even this proceeding seemed reckless to the poor lady, whose thin cheeks burned with nervousness and excitement as she contemplated her own daring; seated before a small table in the quiet and comfortable grill-room to which she had descended for dinner.

What would Richard say, her innocent unsuspecting husband, who had wired his final farewell from Plymouth that morning, and was now on his way to Teneriffe — if he could see her now, enjoying *asperges en branches* and a glass of Sauterne, which she had selected as the cheapest white wine she could find on the list?

It need hardly be said that Mrs. Kemys did not look so defiant nor so enterprising as she felt. A gentle retiring middle-aged lady, obviously from the country, dressed in the plainest of black silks, with a *point de Venise* collar fastened by an old-fashioned pearl brooch — she sat sipping white claret diluted

with yellow London water, and waited patiently between the courses until the waiters saw fit to give her the attention she was far too timid to claim.

The secret sense of guilt which now oppressed her was almost doubled by the consciousness that she was enjoying her independence in spite of herself; and she was really shocked by the pleasure with which she dwelt upon the prospect of the morrow's shopping.

She observed her fellow diners with interest. The party of American sightseers; the handsome couple en route for the theatre; the buxom wealthy widow who was evidently an habitu  , and like herself staying in the hotel; and who though she was dining alone, was drinking champagne and having the best of everything; the shy young man, who ate as fast as he could and read the evening paper as he ate; the magnificent head waiter and his youthful pale-faced staff. Everyone and everything interested her. She thought regretfully that old Mrs. Kemys too would have enjoyed this outing had her crippled condition rendered it possible for her to undertake it.

When she had dined she went upstairs into the lounge where she was told the orchestra would play later, and found herself a quiet corner beneath a sheltering palm, where she could listen and look unobserved.

A large party of young people came and sat around the little coffee-tables close by.

The solitary watcher noted almost enviously the

flowing satin gowns, the delicate chiffons veiling fair necks and bosoms, the shining pearls and pretty flushed powdered faces and wonderful waves of rippling hair, under the rose-shaded electric light.

Her visions of the morning shopping paled in glory. It was not the mere expenditure of money, she reflected, but time and knowledge and taste, that went to the production of the exquisite finish of these dainty maidens' apparel.

Her eyes were not sufficiently trained to recognise at a glance, as a Londoner would recognise, the difference between real and artificially aided beauty; and thinking of the homeliness of Annie's attire, she began to wonder if after all she had allowed her maternal pride to prejudice her unduly in favour of her child's good looks.

The music now beginning softly dispelled her doubts, and lulled her into a blissful content with the world. Like most highly strung and imaginative persons Annette was ultra-sensitive to the influence of music. Every variation of melody affected her emotional nature. The grand march from *Tannhauser* revived her melting courage and inspired her with determination enough to defy a dozen Richards; a morsel from Greig gave her back her tender dreams of Annie's loveliness; Mascagni's *Intermezzo* resolved itself into a wordless prayer for her child's happiness; a selection from *Carmen* restored her joyous anticipations of the morrow; and a Mexican Lullaby soothed her so effectually that in-

stead of lying awake all night after her journey, she slept soundly for the first time since Richard's departure.

In the grey London morning she opened her eyes with a quite unwonted sensation of vigour and hopefulness.

Something of her old spirit and energy appeared to reanimate her. As she made her simple toilet she found herself humming a tune, and was so surprised that she smiled at her own reflection in the glass.

She had written a little note to Roddy on the previous night, telling him she had come up to town to do some shopping and asking him to dine with her early to go to a theatre. She felt that the business of the day would keep her so fully occupied that it would be better not to attempt to make an earlier appointment, much as she longed to see her son.

She breakfasted early, and was out and about almost before the shops were open; carrying her shabby purse, now heavily weighted; and the list of commissions which she had compiled during her journey with anxious care.

A customer who arrived at such an hour, who was so quietly dressed, and so timid in manner as Mrs. Kemys, received but indifferent attention, until the extent of her purchases aroused respect in the interested minds of the sellers.

She returned to her grill-room for luncheon much excited by her purchases, and after luncheon she

plunged once more into her work, almost recklessly extending her list of necessities for Annie's projected visit, that it might embrace luxuries hitherto undreamed-of.

By the end of the long afternoon she began to feel the fatigue of such unwonted exertions in the close atmosphere of London drapery establishments, and much of her pleasure and excitement consequently died away. At six o'clock she went into the park, for the weather was unusually warm for the time of year, and sat under the trees, to rest herself in the open air.

The evening freshness cooled her feverish cheeks, and the novelty of the scene amused and interested her. She was begining to wonder if it were time to return to her hotel and prepare for Roddy's arrival, when she perceived in the distance a tall broad young man, wearing a light overcoat, over evening dress, and walking with a swing that seemed familiar. A young man with bold blue eyes and dimpled chin and with rather a chubby cherubic face which contrasted funnily with his sturdy breadth of shoulder.

"Roddy!" cried his mother.

Her tone was too rapturous for so public a greeting, and Roddy's manner was repressive though kind, as he led his parent back to her chair under the trees.

"I thought I'd come early, in case you'd like to take a little turn before dinner," he explained. "I say, mater, this is a rum go. My father going off

like this. He wrote me a beastly letter before he went."

"Oh, Roddy, my boy —"

"Hush — they'll hear," he said, glancing apprehensively at the people on the nearest chairs; who, as it happened, were perfectly absorbed in their own affairs; but the young are hyper-sensitive to the possibilities of critical or quizzical observation. He lowered his own tones.

"I suppose he means what he says, mother? I'm to be cut out of — of everything if I go to the Argentine; and of course I shall go," said Roddy, gravely. "The more I've thought it over the less I've regretted my determination. Even if I stuck to old Jacobs & Goldstein he'd find an excuse for quarrelling with me sooner or later. The governor's never liked me; or anyway never since I began to grow up and hold my own a bit; and the sooner I'm independent of him the better. But I do think he might have hardened his heart to part with that one thousand out of all his hoards, and let me have it to start with."

"But Roddy, my darling, that is why I wanted to see you — it will be all right," she said breathless with eagerness. "You are to have your money —"

Roddy turned upon her, pursing up his boyish lips that were so full and rosy still, as if he were about to whistle. He opened his light blue eyes with the guileless look in them that she remembered so well in her father's kind and gentle face.

"You don't mean to say he gave way —"

"No, no, but —"

"Was it poor Granny after all?" cried Rodric.

"No. It was not Granny. It was I who found that I — I could manage to let you have the money, Roddy. It is all right. Just what you wanted. A thousand pounds," she said, trying to smile gaily, and vexed with herself because that novel sensation of guilt made her falter, and caused her heart to beat, and her colour to vary uncomfortably.

What would Roddy say if he knew how she had obtained the money? She felt uneasily that she could not be sure. She had often dwelt with pride upon her certainty that her boys had inherited their grandfather's delicate and scrupulous sense of honour. But Roddy was not to know. She had taken this burden upon her shoulders for her children's sake, and must certainly not suffer them to share it with her.

"You!" said Roddy incredulously. "What do you mean, mother?"

She tried to smile and to take his hand; for once unobservant of his dismay at so public a demonstration.

"Dear Roddy, can't you be content to know that I am giving it to you?"

"No, I can't," he said bluntly. "I'd rather know where you got it, and if my father knows anything about it. You see," he explained, giving her hand an affectionate squeeze and taking the oppor-

tunity to restore it to her covertly. "I like everything to be open and above-board, and to know exactly to whom I am indebted; since it can't *really* be to you, mother dear. You know perfectly well you haven't any money to give me, much less a thousand pounds."

"But it is to me you are — indebted," she said, recovering her presence of mind with the recollection that she could quiet Roddy's uneasiness by a word. "Of course your father does not know, but he will know when he comes home. Mr. Turley advised me that I was entitled to claim some money under a deed executed at the time of my marriage —"

"What deed?"

"Dear Roddy, I cannot go into details with you now. Your father will be told when he returns and perhaps you will hear all about it then. Surely it is sufficient for you when I tell you that Mr. Turley is advising me; and that he made no difficulty at all in advancing me all the money I wanted upon the security thus offered him. He is not letting me have it as a favour. I could not have accepted that," said poor Mrs. Kemys, holding her head high.

"If old Turley is satisfied, of course it's all right," said Roddy. "He's not like that little brute of a Machon. Of course I'd rather have heard all about it — but still — so long as *somebody* knows —"

"You wouldn't trust me?" she said, trying to speak playfully.

"One doesn't expect ladies to understand business and so on," said Roddy, apologetically. "But old Turley — that's a very different thing." His brow cleared. "I say, mother, you are a trump. But I say, by Jove — won't *he* be furious when he comes back and finds out? What will you do then?"

She had asked herself the question with a sinking heart many times already; but she answered lightly.

"By that time your going to the Argentine will be ancient history. And I shall leave old Turley to settle it with him. It is he who will actually advance this money —"

"Do you mean I shall have to pay him back?"

"No, no, no, my dearest boy. It is mine, and it shall be yours — whatever happens," she said, tightening the clasp of her thin hands on each other. "Yours with your mother's love and all her blessing," she said, looking at him with tears in her tired eyes.

"Well — you'll see it will be all right then," said Roddy sturdily. "Jack and I and the others mean business. There's not a slacker among us, you know. That's settled." He leant back with an air of relief, and turned his jolly fresh-coloured face towards her, with the cherubic smile that had outlived his childhood. "I say, I didn't know what you'd like to see, mother, so I got tickets for a musical comedy show. And then I was afraid afterwards you'd have preferred Shakespeare or something poetic of that kind." He looked at her anxiously.

"My dear boy, so long as I am with you, and you are amused, what can it matter to me?" she said, wondering.

"Well, that's all right. It's a ripping piece. I've seen it three times already."

"Three times. You go to the theatre so often?"

"I don't often pay," said Roddy in exculpatory tones. "One pays for *this* kind of show, of course — with the funniest man in London playing *and* Sally Sims."

"You don't often pay!"

"I often get paper. Don't bother about that, mother. Of course you don't understand. Anyway it's very little expense," he said, impatiently. "And talking of expense, how came you to put up at one of the dearest pubs in London? Didn't you know, or what?"

"Oh yes, I knew. I am not perhaps quite as ignorant as you think me," she said, with a faint amused smile. "I thought, dear Roddy, that it might be many a long day before you and I had a little treat together again, and that it would be pleasant and brighter for you to come here. And I shan't be so busy to-morrow, if you can get a day off, and take me to see anything you fancy; it is so long since I went anywhere or saw anything. I should like to go to the Academy, if it doesn't bore you. I could stay until you come down to Nantgwilt — you and Courtenay will escort me home, won't

you? But we shall have to be busy too — for there is *your* outfit to think of now."

"I say — old Turley must have been going it," said Rodric, growing red with pleasure. "I didn't like to say anything about it, mother, but I want all sorts of things. I was going to do with as little as I could, but —"

"We will draw up a list of all the things you ought to have," said his mother, glowing in sympathy with his evident and unconcealed delight. "And Roddy dear, you needn't think too much about economy. Just for this once — you must have, not only what is absolutely necessary, but the best — the very best that I can give you," said Mrs. Kemys, as vehemently as though she were defying some unseen power.

CHAPTER XIII

SOPHY IN HER ELEMENT

WHEN Mrs. Kemys returned from London she was escorted by both her sons, who observed the extent and the newness of her baggage with an amaze which, man-like, they concealed by silence.

She had not thought it advisable to ask Courtenay to join her in London, for the brothers were not much less inclined to quarrel now than they had been in their early boyhood, and she had longed for a few days' quiet converse with her first-born, who was presently to go so far away from her.

Sophy appeared on the door-step of the Manor House to receive her mother, with a little brother dancing on either hand. Since old Mrs. Sharman's departure to Artramont, whither she had gone to attend upon Annie during her visit to the Yoraths, Sophy had been in her element.

She had always, as she often complained to herself, been kept in the background; but in the absence of her mother and elder sister her opportunity had come, and she had not been slow to take advantage of it.

Her display of energy had almost paralysed her grandmother.

"I shall make it my business to see that Granny lacks no attention that she is accustomed to, in consequence of Mamma's absence," said Sophy, though she was well aware that she was not one of her grandmother's favourites. "But because *she* is unfair there is no reason that *I* should be undutiful," she remarked to Sharman one morning when old Mrs. Kemys had received her well-meant advances more ungraciously than usual. "If it had been Annie she would have been delighted, but because it is *I* who carried her over a pot from the conservatory, she only says I am officious, and that if she wants flowers she can ask the gardener for them."

"Well, Miss Sophy, you shouldn't take so much on yourself," was Sharman's snubbing response to this confidence. It was no wonder that Sophy rejoiced when Sharman received orders to go over to Artramont and leave the little boys to their sister's care.

Sophy took great care of her little brothers, but her reign was a despotic one, and the thought that it was over doubled their joy in their mother's return.

Roddy and Courtenay had nothing more striking to observe than "Hallo, Sophy!" and "Well Sophia, how are you?" by way of greeting to their sister; but while her mother was absorbed by the boisterous welcome of the little boys, and Roddy in lending a hand with the luggage which threatened to overbalance the rickety station cab, Sophy slipped her arm

through Courtenay's and hurried him away to the drawing-room.

"I have got the tea ready for you all, but oh Courtenay, I must say a word to you alone. I want to ask you — but first — what do you think of my frock?" she cried breathlessly.

"What do I think of your frock? I don't see anything the matter with it. What on earth are you so excited about?" said Courtenay unsympathetically.

"Don't you see it's new? Mamma sent it down from London. Courtenay, what *does* it all mean?"

"What does what all mean? I wish you wouldn't be so cryptic," said Courtenay, with unruffled dignity and entire want of interest.

"Hasn't Mamma said anything to you? Hasn't she offered any explanation?"

"I've not had two words with her. I only met them at the station. What are you driving at? Do you mean — yes, she did whisper something about its being all right, and I mustn't worry over my debts. Have you been telling her, you little idiot, about those trumpery book bills of mine? I thought you'd have had more sense than to go worrying her about that," said Courtenay ungratefully. "I shall never trust you again. And she needn't have known about them at all, for now Papa's gone, I don't care how much I'm dunned since it won't come to his ears." Sophy looked so mortified that he relented. "Besides, I've some literary work offered me now,

which may enable me to pay off all I owe for myself," he said importantly.

"Literary work!" said Sophy as awestruck as the most exacting of brothers could wish an adoring sister to be; though the subject uppermost in her own mind prevented her from pursuing further enquiries for the moment upon the topic most interesting to Courtenay. "But I wasn't thinking of your bills, Courtenay, I was thinking of Mamma's goings-on."

"What goings-on?" said Courtenay, startled, as well he might be.

"Why her rushing up to London directly Papa had started, and giving orders for Sharman to go and act as maid to Annie at Artramont; and sending a trunk full of new clothes, for she wrote and told Sharman she needn't take a single one of Annie's old ones. And the things that have come down from the Stores — house-linen, and provisions, and new suits for the little boys —" Sophy grew breathless over her rapid enumeration of her mother's enormities — "and she staying at an expensive hotel and taking Roddy to theatres and getting him his outfit, for she mentioned it all in her letter to me yesterday. What would Papa say? When he wouldn't even hear of Roddy going at all and threatened to cut him off with a shilling and stop his allowance! And now Granny says he is to go after all, and get his thousand pounds and everything," said Sophy.

"I suppose the governor caved in before he started," said Courtenay.

"How could he? Mamma hasn't seen him since he made up his mind to go, and when his last telegram came she turned as white as a sheet and crumpled it up and dropped it on the floor and went out of the room. And I picked it up and read it, and it said *Determination unchanged. Desire subject dropped!*"

"You little skunk. You don't mean you read it?" cried Courtenay.

"It wasn't a letter," said Sophy defiantly, but she grew very red. "Just a telegram! I thought anyone could read a telegram. And how did I know? It might have been bad news — something I ought to know."

"Something *you* ought to know!" derisively.

"I gave it to Mamma when she came back to look for it, and she never scolded me. You are very unkind, Courtenay, and me that was so glad you were coming back and saving up everything to tell you," said Sophy, showing an inclination to weep.

"Girls have no sense of honour," said Courtenay, sternly.

"Anyway they are not as selfish and horrid and disagreeable as boys," said Sophy, with trembling lips.

"It sounds rather absurd, do you know, for a chit of seventeen to talk to a fellow of my age as a boy," said Courtenay.

"It would sound more absurd if I called him a man," retorted Sophy.

Courtenay shrugged his shoulders, walked to the window and whistled. Then he turned round and perceiving Sophy's flaxen head prone upon the cushions in the corner of the sofa by the tea table, his conscience pricked him.

In his heart he knew he had a very devoted and loyal little sister, and Sophy's faultiness had in many ways served him better than Annie's high-mindedness.

"Look here, I say, don't be a donkey, Sophy. Here are the others coming," he said awkwardly.

"Let them come," said Sophy, inaudibly.

"Oh, all right. If you don't want to make it up," he said in injured tones.

Sophy lifted her head and wiped her eyes.

"You've changed and grown stuck-up, if a fellow can't say a word without making you blub in this rotten manner," he said, descending to the slang he despised in his anxiety to mollify Sophy. "You used to be jolly and affectionate and all that sort of thing when I came home — but I suppose it's nothing to you — now!"

Her arms were round his neck, and she was standing on tiptoe pressing her hot cheeks and tearful eyes against his smooth young face.

"Oh, Courtenay, Courtenay, how can you say so, when you *know* how glad I was to see you —"

"Well, all right, take care, you'll rumple my collar," he said, kissing her hastily, and releasing himself from the hug which she was bestowing upon him

in an agony of self-reproach. "And I say, you might run and get my yellow book-bag out of the hall. I don't want it taken up stairs. Since Papa is away, I might just as well do my work in his study, and I mean to ask Mother to let me."

Sophy had sped upon his errand almost before her brain could grasp the audacity of this proposal; she reached the hall in time to hear Manuel's artless communication to his mother.

"It's been horrid without you, Mammy. When Sophy's cross she's a beast!"

The word came oddly from the cherubic lips.

"You ungrateful imp," cried the justly indignant sister.

"Don't be a tell-tale," said Corney, admonishing his little brother severely. "Mother, do you know the new parson's been here twice. He walked round and round the garden ever so many times with Sophy, and he gave me a shilling."

Mrs. Kemys looked enquiringly at her daughter, now busily engaged in extricating the yellow bag from the heap of luggage in the hall. The heaviness of Courtenay's books might have accounted for the redness of Sophy's face.

"It was only Mr. Cantrill, Mamma. Surely you can't have forgotten about his coming," said Sophy. "He arrived the day before Mr. Meredydd and Jack went away. Everybody is charmed with him. I met him at the Byewaters and he walked back with me, and — and the two front doors being so close,

I thought you would wish me to ask him in and see the garden, the wallflowers being just at their best. He said he was fond of gardening. Of course I sent for the children as chaperons," said Sophy, with dignity. "I assure you he is a great acquisition. We have met over the Easter decorations and he showed me lots of interesting things in the church that I'd never noticed though I've been there all my life. But of course I couldn't ask him to stay to tea, being alone, even at the risk of seeming inhospitable."

"I am glad you are so prudent, Sophy," said her mother, as gravely as she could.

The explanation of her sudden wealth which Mrs. Kemys had given to Roddy, and which Sophy's curiosity obliged her to repeat, easily satisfied her second son, who seldom bestowed much attention on anything outside of his own concerns. She would not, however, consent to Courtenay's proposal that he should occupy the study during his father's absence, and suggested that he should content himself with the smoking room.

"But Roddy is always in and out," said Courtenay, who was unpacking his precious books.

"Surely, dear boy, in the few days you have here together, you could put your college work aside and enjoy your holiday. You will not see Roddy again, perhaps, for years."

"You do not understand, dear mother." Courtenay was very tall and thin and narrow-chested, with the pale short-sighted eyes of the student; he smiled down upon his mother from a great height, and the smile expressed but a little of the superiority he felt. "I have my literary work to do."

"Literary work?" she said, bewildered.

"I told you he was writing, Mamma," said Sophy delighted, "but you never pay any attention to what *I* say."

Courtenay frowned at his sister.

"This is not the work to which Sophy refers, that *I could* put aside. But this is a commission."

"A commission!"

"Reviewing," he explained in an off-hand way, pointing to a heap of books.

"Do you mean that *you* are to criticise the work of real authors?" cried Sophy, gasping.

"What else could reviewing mean?" said Courtenay, trying to look more amused than annoyed. "Why should I not be a critic as well as another man? I can write English, I hope."

"Is that all that is wanted?" said Sophy, with unconscious satire.

Mrs. Kemys took one of the volumes in her hand and looked doubtfully at her son, and Rodric looked over her shoulder. It appeared to be an abstruse work of a theological character, and the writer modestly confessed in the preface that the results of a

life-time's study were compressed between its pages.

Courtenay interpreted her expression in his own way.

"It is all right, dear mother. Are you afraid I shall be very severe with the poor old gentleman?" he said smiling benignly. "His discoveries are slightly antiquated and his language archaical, and I may allow myself to be a little satirical over his assumption that there is anything left to say on the subject he has chosen; but I assure you I shall let him down very gently."

"What an ass you are, Courtenay," said Roddy, bursting into a laugh. "Can't you see my mother's wondering how you have the cheek to think anyone would care to have *your* opinion?"

"Why shouldn't they care!" cried the indignant Sophy. "He's an Oxford man."

"He's an Oxford undergraduate, my dear, though I bet he's been writing such pompous letters that his editor believes him to be a don at least —"

"Let me tell you, editors are not so ill-informed on the subject of the identity of —"

"Lord, if the bald-headed old buffer who wrote this book with his heart's blood could see the beardless stripling —"

"Boys, boys," said Mrs. Kemys, endeavouring to interpose.

"It is not age, but ability, that counts in these matters," thundered Courtenay. "One would imagine I was undertaking a herculean task, whereas it is far

easier to review a dull book of this stamp than to write it."

"That I can well believe," said Roddy, with a shout of laughter.

"One is never a prophet in one's own country," said Courtenay, with heightened colour. "I shall give the whole of my conscientious attention to this work as I should to any other upon which I had to pass judgment, even if it were mere fiction. It may be that some authors would prefer young and conscientious critics to old and hardened ones, who might give only half attention to their books."

"Old and hardened critics have probably learnt to see at a glance which books are worth their conscientious attention, and which aren't," retorted Roddy.

"It is fortunate that my editor has a greater belief in my literary powers than my family appear to have," said Courtenay bitterly.

Roddy suddenly perceived that his brother was struggling with a mortification that threatened to choke him, so being good-natured in the main he took himself off, whistling loudly, and Mrs. Kemys made a sign which ordered Sophy to follow her eldest brother, while she addressed herself to the task of soothing the injured student.

"Dear boy, you know how proud we all are, even Roddy in his heart, of your talents and your industry. It is quite right to try and distinguish yourself by —"

"I do not wish to deceive you, mother," said Courtenay, interrupting, "the work which was ob-

tained for me by a literary friend — was undertaken less from the hope of earning any distinction (though I feel myself peculiarly fitted by nature for the task of criticism) than for the sake of the — of the honorarium," he stammered.

"Dear Courtenay, it is good and honest of you to try and earn money. I know it is the payment of your debts you think about," she said simply.

"I am glad someone gives me credit for good intentions," he said, still ruffled. "You know how ill I can afford to spare any time from my reading —"

"If you must read — I will not try to prevent you," said his mother, coaxingly, "but this work you can set aside when you like, my dearest boy, for I want you to enjoy every moment of your vacation, and to let me pay whatever you owe, and to keep any money you earn for your own pleasures."

"It was only the — the prospect of getting this literary work to do, that made me launch out into getting the necessary works of reference, which a reviewer should have to his hand," stammered Courtenay, relapsing in his confusion into a more natural and boyish manner, "and I am almost ashamed to say —"

"How much is it that you owe altogether, dear Courtenay?" said his mother, softly.

Mrs. Kemys hurried over to the cottage as soon as she could.

"I am very thankful to see you again, Annette,"

said her mother-in-law. "One does not know how much one will miss people until they are gone."

"Sophy said she had tried to take my place."

"That is what Sophy will never succeed in doing," said the old lady contemptuously. "If it had been Annie now. My dear, I have heard nothing from Annie, which is surely a good sign, so considerate and affectionate as she has always been."

"I suppose it is awkward doing anything with one arm in a sling. She has sent me the merest scrawls; but Lady Yorath writes she is delighted with her, and wants to keep her."

The old lady would not express her satisfaction in words, but she nodded and beamed.

"And the boys?"

"Roddy has everything he had set his heart on most. Field-glasses — revolvers, guns. Poor fellow, I let him go with a friend of his own to get everything he thought necessary, while I saw to the more prosaic part of his outfit. His ideas were very moderate after all, if we except the guns. Still, I have spent a great deal of money." She smiled rather deprecatingly.

"Quite right," said old Mrs. Kemys, stoutly. "There is a time for spending and a time for saving."

"This is evidently the time for spending," said the younger Mrs. Kemys, and she mentioned the sum total of her extravagance.

"What does it matter?" said the old lady, but she

could not help a slight gasp. "Does Mr. Turley object?"

"On the contrary, he begs me to draw on him for as much more as I want, and says the thousand pounds will be ready before Rodric is. Dear Granny, I suppose I am growing a little reckless. My feeling is that I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb," said Annette, smiling faintly.

"That is exactly my own opinion," said old Mrs. Kemys, grimly, "however, it is not time for the hanging yet, so we need not discuss it just now. Tell me, what do you think of that little impudent Sophy setting up an admirer of her own?"

"Mr. Cantrill?"

"Why, have you heard?"

"She mentioned that she had met him, and there is nobody else. Surely it cannot be serious," said Mrs. Kemys, half amused and half dismayed. "I have been away so short a time."

"I am not supposing it to be serious, my dear, but Mrs. Byewater felt it her duty to come and see me, and by the very shake of her head I knew she was longing to give me a dig about something — you know how fond of each other we have always been. She said as she heard poor little Sophy had been left quite alone — both her parents gone, and even old Mrs. Sharman — it seemed only kind to tell me people were talking — and things looked rather odd. It appears he has been walking her back after the church decorating —"

"He could hardly help that, since the Rectory is next door."

"Just what I said. But it seems Sophy dropped in to tea at the Byewaters when Mr. Cantrill was there; and as he is nearer forty than thirty, just what Mrs. Byewater might consider a suitable age for Perina or Cynthia, it was very provoking that he should devote himself to sweet seventeen. She hinted that she was afraid Sophy had seen him go into the Red House, and I should have been angry, but on thinking it over — Sophy is such a little minx —"

"No, no," said Sophy's mother.

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Kemys.

"It was time I came home to look after Sophy," said Annette, rising with a smile that was checked by a sigh.

"My dear, I have not vexed or worried you, I hope. I need hardly say I am only joking, and if I were not, he is a most estimable man. Miss Sophy would be a lucky young woman."

"I am not vexed, dear Granny," said Annette. "If I sighed, it was only because I was thinking — I have been thinking ever since I came home — back to this atmosphere of harmless gossip, and little quarrels about nothing, and small household arrangements —"

"Thinking?"

"It is hard to put one's thoughts, or rather one's weariness of spirit, into words," she said. "I was thinking, I suppose, that human life, which can sound

so noble in the abstract, is in reality composed of such endless trivialities. A *true* picture of life as it really is — to *us*, for instance — would be just a record of commonplace detail. And yet that *is* life — to you and to me, and to thousands of women like us.”

“My dear, that is not what life looks like to me, that am come to the end of my task, and can survey it as a whole, or very nearly,” said the older woman. “As for you, you are in the thick of yours, you are toiling as hard as you can; but you cannot see the work for the stitches.”

“Is that it? Such little tiresome stitches, so close together, and my eyes so tired, and longing to look up —”

“You will look up when you have finished.”

CHAPTER XIV

ANNIE IN PARADISE

ANNIE KEMYS had never before paid a visit to a great country house, and when she arrived at Artramont, and was ushered into a room full of people, she was a little pale, a little frightened and rather wondering at her own temerity in having wished so much to come.

But the warm welcome and the soft embrace of her hostess reassured her, and Lady Yorath, excusing herself to her other guests, led her away through the great hall and up the wide staircase to the room prepared for her. On the way she informed her that her maid and her luggage had arrived from Nantgwilt, and that she must not attempt to come down to dinner that evening, but have a little tray carried to her room.

"My maid!" Annie said, in amaze; and as the door was opened and she saw the substantial figure of her old nurse bending over a trunk, she cried with delight, "Why, it is Sharman! How can they have spared you from home, and when Mamma is in London! Is Sophy looking after the little boys?"

Mrs. Sharman, in the midst of her gladness to

see her beloved nursling, was shocked by this frankness; but Lady Yorath laughed, for Annie's simplicity attracted her no less than her beauty.

"I have no doubt Sharman will be able to explain all you want to know, and I will leave you together," she said graciously. "Now be sure and rest after the exertion of the drive, and mind that poor arm does not get hurt. I believe the nurse ought to have come with you to help your maid look after it."

"Oh, no, it would have been a great expense! The doctor can do all that is wanted now," said Annie reproachfully, "and I know how to manage it myself, for that matter. Indeed I am quite able to come down."

But Lady Yorath was firm in her insistence upon the little tray.

"If you feel able after dinner, you must slip on a tea-gown, and let us find you comfortably tucked up on the drawing-room sofa," she said, with motherly solicitude. "My dear, I promised the doctor. There is the strain to be considered as well as your arm, you know."

"Oh, I scarcely feel it at all now," Annie said, "and I haven't got a tea-gown —" she was adding, when Sharman interrupted her with dignity.

"You don't know what you've got, nor yet what you haven't got, Miss Annie, and I'm sure what her ladyship says is the best. For with your arm in a sling I don't know how you could put on an evening

dress nor nothing *but* a tea-gown," and she frowned with warning displeasure at Annie.

Lady Yorath glanced from the reproving maid to the disconcerted innocent mistress with secret amusement.

"I will leave you to settle it all between yourselves," she said, nodding and smiling, at the old nurse. "I see you know how to take care of her," and then she left Annie alone with Sharman.

"What did you mean about a teagown, Sharman? I *can't* wear Sophy's pink wrapper here. They made me wear it at the hospital; and you've no idea how the people downstairs are dressed," she said, half inclined to cry.

"I advise you just to trust yourself to me, as her ladyship said, Miss Annie; and not to suppose that your Mamma, as was a young lady once herself, and presented at Court with the best of them, would have let you come to a house like this without seeing as you had everything a young lady should have," said Sharman. She tried to speak calmly, but her hands shook as she lifted the tray from a bran-new trunk which stood beside the great fourposter.

Annie uttered a stifled scream and fell upon her knees among the luxurious cushions of the blue and white sofa; gasping with amaze and delight as Sharman took from the trunk one trailing diaphanous garment after another, and threw them with elaborate careful carelessness upon the blue silk quilt of the bed.

"But Sharman — they can't be for me! Is Mamma mad? They must have cost a fortune."

"They came down by passenger train this morning. I had a letter from your Mamma to say I was to meet them and come on here with them. She had the things sent from the shops to her hotel and packed them herself in a new trunk, as there wasn't time to get your initials painted on," said Sharman, breathlessly. "I've brought my workbasket all ready to make any alterations as has to be done; but your Mamma knows your measures so well, and you're stock size, she says, being so tall —"

The sight of Annie's ecstasy would have repaid her mother many times over for the trouble and thought she had expended over the choosing of the slender outfit; but indeed it had been a labour of love.

Instead of resting she would have tried on every article in turn had Sharman permitted her to do so, but the old woman obliged her to lie down on the sofa, giving her a filmy lace-trimmed beribboned *peignoir* to keep her quiet, as she would have given a toy to the little boys.

But after the first delighted examination, Annie dropped it in her lap.

"Oh, Sharman, the bills! — when Papa comes home!"

"Now, Miss Annie, you're not to think about that," said Sharman, determinedly; though the thought dominated all the pleasure in her own mind. "Your Granny and she has just found a way to get

the money from Mr. Turley between them, as ladies in their position always can if they give their minds to it; and of course it's easier now your Pa's away as won't hear of money being raised. Gentlemen don't understand how necessary it is for a young lady to be well-dressed," said Sharman importantly, "and you may make up your mind he'll never hear nothing about bills nor any other unpleasantnesses. Mr. Turley will have to manage all that. It's his business. I don't say it mightn't have been difficult to arrange it all if the master had been at home, but it's just Providence that he wasn't. So be grateful to your Mamma, miss, and don't get worrying her over the whys nor yet the wherefores."

"I'm sure I don't want to worry about anything," said Annie, with tears in her blue eyes. "Oh, Sharman, doesn't it seem almost too good to be true!"

When Lady Yorath and the three ladies who were staying in the house came after dinner into the smaller drawing-room, which was known as the French saloon — they found Annie reclining upon the Louis Seize sofa, as she had been bidden; flushed and beautiful, in delicate lace and chiffon, with her golden head outlined against the green brocade panels of the highly decorated walls.

"Did I not tell you she was a Greuze?" murmured Lady Yorath *sotto-voce* to the others, as she introduced them to this charming picture, softly lighted by wax candles in dim and tarnished gilt sconces.

Two of the ladies were contemporaries of their hostess, but the third was a girl of perhaps six and twenty, whom they all called Tony, and Annie subsequently discovered that her name was Antoinette Dumayne, and that she was Lady Yorath's niece.

The young lady appeared to possess some of her aunt's charm and more than all her frankness. She devoted herself to the entertainment of the invalid until the arrival of the gentlemen.

The happiest evenings, like the happiest nations, have no history, and in this restful atmosphere of calm and luxury, and harmony of gentle voices, Annie found very little matter to relate in the letter-diary she had promised herself to write for Sophy's benefit. But after all, in the end, the little journal was found too sacred for any eyes but her own, and laid aside with other precious relics of dream-like days of youth and love in spring-time.

"At last *He* came, and then the time seemed only too short. I did not talk to him much, though Tony gave up her place and moved away from the sofa directly *they* came up, which made me blush, but she did it quite calmly and as a matter of course, and He came straight to my side and asked after my arm so kindly. His manner was as gentle as ever. Then Lady Alswere asked him to play. Somehow it had never even entered my head that he was musical.

"Lady Yorath went to the piano and one of the gentlemen lighted the candles. First he played a

violin solo called a *Fête à Trianon*. Music always calls up visions, and I could really *see* the powdered, tight-laced, high-bred Court ladies curtseying to Marie Antoinette, and courtly nobles leading them to the dance by the tips of their delicate fingers.

“Then he played what is called an *obligato*, while his mother sang the *Serenata* of Braga, which made me want to cry. It is all like a dream.

“I wish the boys could just see *him* with his mother.

“It would be such a lesson to them. They laugh at Sophy and me for being distressed about their manners; though, poor fellows, what *can* you expect, with Papa like a bear? But, oh, it is such a comfort to see that some gentlemen can be courteous even to their *own relations*.

“To be sure Roddy is very fond of Mamma, but he would let her wait on him hand and foot, whereas *He* treats his mother like a queen. I am sure she looks like one. I never saw her in evening dress before, and she is wonderful, in ivory satin all veiled with soft lace and a great string of pearls round her throat.

“Her beautiful dark hair is just a little frosted here and there, and oddly enough so is his on the temples. Their faces are alike and their arched black eyebrows and light hazel eyes, but she is vivacious and quick and he rather silent and stately. They may say the Yoraths were common miners, but

for my part I am glad he comes of a race of great, strong working men. Tony's father, Lord Dumayne, who is *His* uncle, of course (being Lady Yorath's brother and the head of her family, which is as old as the hills), is *such* a rickety-looking, feeble little man, though he is very polite, as indeed all the gentlemen here are. . . . Tony sang a French song and then a German and then an English, but as she does not pronounce a single syllable distinctly, I only knew what language she was singing because she wisely told us beforehand. Then He sang a song called *To Anthea*, and I wished it had been *To Annie*. . . . [*scratched out but still legible.*]

"Waking in the morning here is delicious. It feels almost wicked to be enjoying such luxury when I think of the others and of poor Mamma. I am afraid it almost makes me really wish to be rich.

"Sharman is ten times more respectful here than she is at home, and told me that it was by the mercy of Providence she had brought her best black silk, or she doesn't know what she would have done in the evenings when the maids have a regular late dinner with one of the under footmen to wait on them. She tells me lots of gossip, but I am generally too sleepy to listen in the morning. It is so heavenly to open one's eyes on these pretty blue curtains, and the wallpaper all bunches of roses tied with blue ribbons exactly like the chintz covers, and the dressing-table all muslin and bows. I wish we could have things pretty and fresh like this at home. But Sophy

and I will know better what *could* be done now; but, oh — it could never be the same, though our house is really a prettier and older house than this, if only — But it is too ungrateful to be so discontented. Why can't I enjoy the delightful things here, and not make comparisons? Sharman opens my curtains and lets in the morning sunshine, and brings the most delicious wee Dresden tea-set to my bedside, on the tiniest of porcelain trays.

“ I have never felt so *really* grown-up as I do when I lean back against the great lavender-scented lace-edged pillows, in the dressing jacket dear, dear Mamma thoughtfully bought for me, and sip my tea! It's so nice to know one *can't* be late, and to lie there, looking out at the blue sky and the foliage against it round the window, listening to the birds, and dreaming of — never mind who.

“ And it *is* nice to have Sharman waiting on me, with nobody shouting for her to come elsewhere; and to have such exquisite things to put on. But nothing is so nice as the going downstairs and knowing that I am to have another long, blissful, enchanting day with . . .

“ He had to go to London yesterday, and though Lady Yorath was sweeter than ever to me, the day seemed dreadfully long. Oh, how ashamed I am to be so ungrateful! Tony took me for a walk into the woods; the very same I took yesterday with *him*. Oh, how different it seemed now. But she talked of quite interesting things. She said her aunt was

in despair because He would not marry; and that it was so unselfish of her to wish it, as then she would of course have to turn out of Artramont. I felt indignant, and said I hoped he would not marry anyone who would be capable of letting her make such a sacrifice. Tony laughed and said she would not like to live with a mother-in-law, though her aunt was the nicest woman in the world, and was always inviting pretty girls to stay, but instead of falling in love with them *he* was always rushing away to Central Africa or somewhere, to shoot big game, for months and months. She believed one reason was that he was so shy he hated the thought of a wedding and fuss and ceremony, and that she sometimes feared it would end in his never getting married at all. Well, even that would be better than his marrying the wrong person. . . .

"*He* came back and we had another heavenly evening, and he sang *Could I but make you the love of my life* so beautifully that I found myself crying. . . .

"It is so warm — just like summer. Darling Roddy is coming over to see me and say goodbye. I am perfectly miserable to think how selfish and heartless I must have become with all this petting and spoiling over my broken arm; for I had forgotten it was yesterday he and Courtenay were to come home with Mamma.

"Lady Yorath said Roddy must spend a long day here and it is settled he will ride over to luncheon.

. . . I sent a note, as Lady Yorath said I might, by a servant who waited for the answer, and told Mamma I thought I ought to come home for dear Roddy's last days if he were really going to the Argentine. But she sent back urging me to remain *here*, and I couldn't help being relieved, though it sounds as if I thought more of *him* than of my darling Roddy. But of course it's *quite different* . . .

"Roddy came over. He is so much improved and so nice and manly, I was very proud of him. Of course his manners were much better here than they are at home, where he is sometimes a little rough, poor darling, which I put down *entirely* to Papa's example. Lady Yorath said he was a darling, and asked him to come over for the week-end. I think he fell a little in love with her, as everyone does. It is very extraordinary when one thinks of poor Mamma, for Lady Yorath is actually even older; yet no one *thinks* of putting *her* on one side, or not paying her little attentions, etc. Yesterday I saw Mr. Jerningham kiss her hand. I can't imagine any gentleman kissing poor Mamma's hand. I thought it so good for Roddy to see how women *ought* to be treated, but he was more interested in *Him* even than in *her*, and was quite cross with me for not knowing he was a famous sportsman and supposed to be one of the best shots in England. . . .

"After lunch Roddy kept him for *hours* showing him different sorts of rifles and pistols and things

of that kind, and talking about the Argentine, where it appears *he* has been, though I did not know it.

“Roddy was a little annoyed with me for not knowing it, and says it would have been something for me to talk about. As if one could *choose* the topics of one’s conversation with gentlemen. Dear Roddy! *Of course he did not notice anything.* Boys never do. But I am so glad *he* liked him. Everyone did. He had the most astonishing things to tell me about Mamma. How she stayed at the most expensive hotel, and took him to theatres. (Of course he put it that she asked him to take her; so like a boy! But I liked it, as it sounded more manly.) And they had tip-top dinners, and drank champagne in honour of his coming of age. What *would* Papa have said? And his outfit is simply splendid, though he wishes now he had bought some different kind of revolver which *He* said was the best, and Roddy is half inclined to change his. He explained that old Turley found out that some money was due to Mamma, so that accounts for her sending me such wonderful things, poor darling. But besides this he says he does not know what has come over her; she seemed so excited and in such good spirits all the time she was in London, though she is more like herself now she is at Nantgwilt again. He said he supposed it must be the relief of the governor’s departure, and I begged him not to say ‘the governor,’ and he told me not to be a little prig, which offended me, but I forgave him because, after all, it is Roddy,

and he looked so nice and chubby. It is only that I want my brother to be as perfect as *he* is. . . .

" . . . Roddy says it is all settled about the Argentine, and that his thousand pounds will be twenty thousand before I can look round. He says he's always felt sure Papa would cut him off the first excuse he had, and it was no use waiting, and in my heart I'm sure he's right, but it's a shame. Oh, how I pray he'll make his fortune. Even if he is a little rough, he's my *own, own* brother, and I love him. He says Courtenay is a greater ass than ever. I wish the boys got on, but Courtenay *is* tiresome and would try the patience of a saint. But Roddy says he's the cleverest fellow going for all that and he believes he will end by getting a double first, whatever that may mean, and that the old Oxford dons think no end of him. He heard this from a friend of his own who went up with Courtenay and who can't bear him, so he says it can't be a prejudiced opinion. . . .

"To-day Lady Yorath took me into *His* workshop. He is so clever with his hands that he can make almost anything, and the old estate carpenter told me it was a pity he wasn't a real workman, for he was the only gentleman he'd ever seen who could have earned his own living. He laughed and said he had inherited his taste for manual labour.

"He showed me his grandfather's pick hanging up in the hall, and said he wouldn't part with it for worlds. The old man really was a miner, and rose

to be a colliery owner, and a rich man, entirely through his own brain and pluck and industry, and he lived to see his son in Parliament, though unluckily he died before he became a member of the government. . . . He showed me the portrait of his grandfather; a regular shrewd Welsh face, with high cheek-bones and bright colour and dark eyes. His father's face was quite as shrewd, but much more kindly and humorous. He was a very big man, almost a giant, but *He* is much handsomer than they could ever have been. . . . This is such a different world; it is strange to remember we are only ten miles from Nantgwilt after all. . . . After Easter they are going to London, and I shall have to go home. Of course it will be very nice to be back, in some ways. . . . Oh, Annie, Annie, don't be — a hypocrite. . . .

"I don't know how to write this, but I am so afraid of forgetting a single detail (not that I ever could), that I must, *must* put it down now at once, while it is all so fresh and wonderful. . . . I am in my own room and Sharman just came in to unfasten my frock, and then I put on my new white *peignoir* that dear Mamma sent me, and told Sharman it was so late that I could not let her sit up and brush my hair because she looked so sleepy. But it was because I wanted to be alone and think over what had happened. However, it was no use, for she would take down my hair and brush it and brush it, just as usual. So *at last* she went, and left me

alone; and at first I could only kneel by the open window and ask God to look into my heart and see how grateful I was, for words would not come, but now I am going to try and write it down, though my hand shakes so. . . .

“Instead of sitting in the French saloon as usual we went to-night into the big drawing-room which opens also into the library, and *he* sang *To Anthea* again because I asked him to. Then Lord Dumayne and Lady Alswere and Mr. Jerningham went into the library with Lady Yorath to play bridge, and Tony, who is the kindest and most self-sacrificing person in the *whole world*, offered to play poker-patience with Mrs. Guthlake, who was delighted.

“They sat quite close to the log fire, which was large enough to roast an ox, but poor Mrs. Guthlake never seems to be warm enough, and as there are great big screens on either side of the fireplace they were quite shut off. It is the largest room I ever saw; all lighted with electric light in soft yellow silk shades, which throws a golden glow over the big palms and the brocade panels and the old pictures.

“He played the piano for a little while, and then came over to the sofa where I was pretending to like watching the poker-patience, and asked me if I did not find the chimney-corner too hot; and of course my face *was* burning. And he asked if I were fond of miniatures because if so his mother had a beautiful collection of historical French miniatures which he would like me to see. The cabinet where they are

kept was in a recess close by the furthest window, which was luckily open, though sheltered by heavy curtains stretching across the window seat. He made me sit there where I could get a little air, quite out of sight of the fireplace. Then he brought the drawer of the cabinet, and put it on the seat between us, and lifted out the miniatures one by one, and told me their names and all about them, but somehow I could not take in a single word . . . and I don't think he always knew what he was saying, for I do remember that when he gave me one of a very décolleté lady with a long, long waist, and flowers in her curls, he told me it was the portrait of the poor little dauphin; but I was too agitated to point out the mistake, and presently he almost *threw* these valuable, *valuable* miniatures back into the drawer, and came and knelt on one knee beside me and took my hands in his and whispered *Annie* . . . After all, I cannot write down those sacred words — they are written in my heart and will be till I die . . .

“Oh please, please God let me be worthy of him but that is just what I know I can never be. Oh if I could be all *he* thinks me . . . and he fell in love with me the very first day, when he lifted me onto the roadside, and my hat fell off on his knee, and he wanted to know when it began with me, but I wouldn't tell him. Perhaps I will some day, but it is much, much too soon, and when I think that a month ago I didn't even know him . . .

" I felt I *couldn't* face them all, and he laughed at me, but oh, so tenderly, and showed me another way out of the big drawing-room through the saloon, which was very dimly lighted, and he stopped there and asked me if he might kiss me and I said no, and he did; and he put his arms round me, and I hid my face on his shoulder, and he told me that I belonged to him for ever and ever, and that he would tell his mother about it to-night. At last I begged him to let me go, for I was frightened someone would come, and so he came into the hall, and lit my candle, and I came upstairs. Even now I can hardly believe it's true, and that I'm really to be *his* — wife — perhaps it's unlucky to write it. I wish I hadn't. Oh God, let it be true . . .

" Just as I wrote that there was a little knock at the door, and his mother came in. She had taken off her dinner dress too, and wore a soft rose-coloured cashmere with a Watteau pleat, and she looked more like a queen than ever, with her dark hair, lightly frosted, drawn off her dear beautiful tender face, with the little lines and shadows giving the touch of sadness and meaning which horrid round smooth faces like mine haven't got.

" She shut the door, and I pushed away my writing, and just stood before her, ashamed to look her in the face after that one first glance, for oh! if she should reproach me for wanting to take her son from her.

" But she went and sat down in the big armchair

by the fire, and held out her hand to me and said 'Come' with her enchanting smile that is always half droll and half pathetic; and I went and fell on my knees like the selfish guilty, guilty wretch I felt myself to be, and hid my face in her lap.

"We had a long, long talk, and she actually said she wanted me to be her daughter the first moment she saw me, and that she knew even before then that Austen had fallen in love with me. I said 'Did he tell her?' and she laughed and said 'No, that wasn't necessary, she knew him far too well. And her only fear was, would I love him as he loved me?' I couldn't help firing up when she said that, and I told *her* what I never, never could have told *him*, of course, that I adored him with all my heart and soul and would die to save even his little finger from being hurt; and then she laughed and I laughed, and we both cried a little and she took me in her arms and kissed me, and said I was a darling, and I knew she understood. And to-morrow we are all going over to see dear, dear Mamma and if she consents I am to go to London with them, and oh what *will* she say, and Sophy and the boys and all of them, and how *can* I ever, ever be thankful enough that Papa is away . . . "

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. BYEWATER ON THE WATCH

OLD Mrs. Byewater, who had declared her suspicion that Sophy Kemys watched the goings in and the comings out of the callers at the Red House, now in her turn observed from the window of her little dining-parlour, which looked down the village street — the arrival of Lady Yorath's motor-brougham at the door of the Manor House.

"Bless my soul," she cried to her daughters, "Annie must have come home. I recognise the liveries, though why the grandson of a miner should be allowed to have liveries is more than I can tell."

Cynthia and Perina were not less excited than their mamma.

"What can it mean? The last time I heard, Annie had been invited to stay on," said Cynthia.

"And had accepted. Mrs. Kemys could not be certain for how long, but it was understood for some time."

"Girls," said Mrs. Byewater, "it is very odd, I see no luggage."

"They would not have luggage in that beautiful car, mamma. It would follow in a cart."

"I tell you what," said Mrs. Byewater, and the

flowers in her hat began to dance on their wires, for by great good luck, as she afterwards said, she was dressed for walking,—“something has happened, and Annie has been sent home. I always said something would happen. It was practically throwing her at that young man’s head to send her there at all. Neither old Mrs. Kemys nor Annette chose to understand me when I said so; and yet I said it out distinctly enough.”

She raised her voice at the mere recollection. Being slightly deaf, though she would not admit it, Mrs. Byewater was apt to talk more loudly than she was at all aware.

“Well, one comfort is that no one will ever be able to accuse me of having thrown my daughters at any man’s head. If there are not enough men to go round, more’s the pity.”

Poor Miss Cynthia exchanged a very faint glance of understanding with her sister, who skilfully redirected her mother’s attention to the subject in hand.

“*What* do you suppose has happened, Mamma? Can Lord Yorath have fallen in love with Annie?”

“Fallen in love! Pooh, nonsense,” said Mrs. Byewater, sharply. “Annie is hardly out of her short frocks. There has been some silly flirtation, no doubt, and his mother has naturally found it out, and sent Miss Annie home.”

“Poor Annie,” said Cynthia.

"Nonsense," said Perina, *sotto-voce*, "we're only guessing."

"The motor's waiting. What can that be for?" said Cynthia.

"I believe we're all wrong," said Perina, suddenly. "It's Lady Yorath bringing Annie to say good-bye to Roddy."

Mrs. Byewater was annoyed by this conjecture, but as the motor-brougham remained stationary, she began to think there might be something in it.

"It is five minutes to four. We will give them five minutes more," she said, becoming excited, "and if it does not move then, we may conclude that whoever it is has gone in, and so Annette will be at home."

The five minutes went by, all three ladies being too much agitated to converse until the church clock struck four; then they rose simultaneously from their seats.

There was no need for explanation; in a moment they were all hurrying past the churchyard to the door of the Manor House.

"Yes, yes, Pryse, I know Mrs. Kemys is at home, but has Miss Annie come home or is it only a call? That is what we want to know," said Mrs. Byewater, who gave Pryse half a crown every New Year's day, and considered that in return he ought to hold himself bound to give her any information concerning the family of his employers, that she desired to have.

"Miss Annie has come over to see us," said old Pryse, with dignity. "And Lady Yorath is with her, and also Lord Yorath has accompanied them. And I've just 'ad a message —"

"Perhaps we had better postpone our call," said Mrs. Byewater, hesitating.

But her daughters demurred — as they were expected to demur.

"And I've just 'ad a message from Mrs. Kemys, to say we're not at home to callers —" said old Pryse, raising his voice slightly.

Such a message had never before been given to Pryse, and he was scarcely less surprised than Mrs. Byewater, who walked home almost dumbfounded, with her two daughters.

"Not at home to callers, and Annie and Lady Yorath and Lord Yorath all arrived at once! There must be something wrong," she repeated over and over again. "I am afraid, girls, that something very unpleasant indeed must have happened, just as I always predicted it would."

In the oak panelled drawing-room that was the very heart and centre of the Manor House, Annette trembled and changed colour, and would have wept, but that she was ashamed.

Annie's arms about her neck, and Annie's voice in her ears had made her understand that her dream of dreams, her hope of hopes, had come true.

Lord Yorath told her, quietly and simply, of his

love for her child, and Lady Yorath, half laughing, and half pathetic, had held out her arms and taken Annie's mother into her soft embrace. But Annette could not shake off the embarrassment, the sadness — almost the shame, that possessed her; even when the lovers had gone their way into the old garden, to find Annie's brothers and sister; leaving the two mothers alone to talk matters over.

If only she had not planned this thing! If she had not dreamt of it, and thought of it, and worked for it. Yet, behold, here was Lady Yorath, laughing, and confessing to the very sin for which Annette's cheeks were burning and her heart throbbing.

"I think I have arranged it all most successfully! I have always longed to find just such a wife for my boy. Innocent and fair and strong and beautiful. They loved each other at first sight. It's a poem — a romance —"

"All — all the worldly advantages are on his side," said poor Mrs. Kemys, in a strangled voice.

"She is a Kemys of Nantgwilt. Do you think that, though I am an alien, I don't know my county history?" said Lady Yorath, gently mocking. "They are exactly matched in looks and health and intelligence, just the right age for each other — an ideal couple! Ought not the children to be —"

"Oh, Lady Yorath! Was there anyone ever so unworldly? And I, who nearly threw myself on your mercy the day we met at the hospital, to ask

you how *could* Annie come to stay with you — a little country girl, badly dressed — whose mother could give her nothing — ”

“ Her clothes are beautiful.”

“ Ah — a miracle happened — ” said Annette, smiling with pale lips. “ But it would need another — ” she looked with wistful light blue eyes half drowned in tears, into those understanding sympathetic brilliant hazel eyes of Lady Yorath, “ it would need another miracle — before that child who has never been outside this isolated country village in her life before — could take her place worthily as your son’s wife. Tell me what to do, that she may not be shamed,— that she may not disappoint him — ”

Annette was thus frank, confessing her weakness, and Annie’s, because instinctively she realised that Lady Yorath was of those who would respond nobly to such an appeal, and justify such confidence. For if a helping hand be wanted, the wise go not to those who have achieved greatness, nor to those who have had greatness thrust upon them, but rather to those who were born great; for these have no petty jealousies, no affectations, no fears lest in helping others, they should weaken their own position.

“ Why ! ” Lady Yorath opened her eyes, “ that is very simple. I came to beg you to let her come to London with me now. She is such a baby, I will guard her innocence and her freshness jealously, but she will learn just as much of the world as will be

necessary to make her ready — for what is to come.”

“ Oh, Lady Yorath — ” Annette wept outright.

“ You are glad? Then why do you cry? Or is it that you don’t like *him*? ” cried his mother, with that petulant laughter.

“ Is there a woman on earth who wouldn’t like him? ”

“ I love you for saying that. I knew all the time, of course, that you must,” said Lord Yorath’s mother.

The ecstatic shrieks and wild rush of the two little brothers when Annie stepped from the porch into the garden, calling them, — startled Sophy, who was sitting placidly over her needlework on the bench beneath the cedar.

Manuel threw himself upon his sister, and as she stooped to kiss him, laced his short arms around her neck and clung to her with all his strength.

“ Oh, Annie, Annie, Annie, you’ve come back,” he cried. “ Me and Corney thought you was never coming — and is your arm quite mended now? ”

Corney’s advance was almost as precipitate, but he stopped short, looking doubtfully from Annie to the tall figure behind her.

“ Manuel,” he said, giving his usual pull of admonition to his little brother’s sleeve. “ There’s a gentleman. And — ”

“ And aren’t *you* going to kiss me, Corney? ” said Annie, merrily. “ Why do you look at me so? ”

Corney stood still and gazed at her; the colour burnt in his honest handsome little face. There were tears in his eyes.

"You're all changed," he burst forth. "You don't look a bit like our Annie. You've got fine clothes on, and look like a young lady, except your arm in a sling."

The laugh that followed dispersed embarrassment. Sophy beaming with delight and curiosity advanced to scold Corney and greet her sister, and Roddy and Courtenay came forward, tennis rackets in hand, to join the little group before the porch.

It was Lord Yorath who gave Annie the opportunity for the tête-à-tête with Sophy that both sisters desired, by asking Roddy if the new guns were on view; and the little boys, perceiving that Sophy meant to tell them to run away, wisely anticipated her orders, and followed the three young men, at a respectful distance, to the gun room.

"Come up to my room, Sophy," Annie said breathlessly. "I have so much to say, and I can't say it here. But we must be quick, or Mamma will be calling me. Better still, let us go to the summer house."

"Oh Annie — you don't mean —"

"Yes, I do. Oh Sophy!"

They sped through the dark tunnel of ilex, and hugged each other in the shelter of the arbour, where Annie very slowly drew the glove off the hand

in the sling, and showed a circle of diamonds on the third finger.

"I'm engaged to *him*," she said. "You mustn't touch it. It's too sacred to be touched, but you may look —"

"Oh Annie, it can't be true! Already?"

"Had you guessed anything?"

"Only that you were in love with him. What is that? One falls in love with anybody, just for fun! But I never dreamt of this. Goodness! Does it happen so quickly as that when *they* make up their minds," said Sophy, awestruck.

"It happens in a moment, and the whole world is changed," said Annie. "Oh Sophy, I hope you will be as happy as I am some day. Not that there could ever be another like him."

"I should not want mine to be so tall," said Sophy, "but then I'm shorter than you. Oh Annie, what did he say?"

"As if I could tell you, or anybody! What do you think Papa will say? That is the question."

"What does it matter what Papa says? Of course he will be disagreeable. He always is. But you can marry whom you like when you're twenty-one."

"Three years! You *don't* suppose he would wait three years," cried Annie, scarlet. "Why he wants it to be now at once. But I said No. And Lady Yorath said not till the end of the London season. Oh Sophy, I am going to go to London with them,

and spend the season with them in Eaton Place."

"What's the good of that when you're engaged?" said practical Sophy.

"Girls don't go to London to look for husbands," said Annie, reproachfully.

"What do they go for then?"

"Oh, to — to see pictures and theatres and go to balls, and meet people. And learn how to dress and do their hair properly," said Annie vaguely.

"I think you've learnt the last two things, already."

"Lady Yorath has taught me a great deal," said Annie, blushing. "I sometimes think I must be dreaming, Sophy, it's all so delightful. Next season you'll have to come and stay with *me*."

"Perhaps *I* shall be engaged myself by that time," said Sophy, tossing her flaxen head. Then she repented and kissed her sister and cried and said she would love to come, but it *did* seem a little unfair that everything should come to Annie, even if she *was* the eldest; and that she should be Lady Yorath, and have everyone flattering her while Sophy, only a year younger, would be nobody at all.

Annie was too much used to Sophy's little ebullitions of jealousy to be moved by them; she kissed away the tears, and laughed at her, and long before Roddy came in search of them, they were once more deep in excited discussion.

"Let *me* have a word with her, Sophy. There's tea laid under the cedar, and nobody to keep the

brats or the puppy from eating all the cakes, or to help my mother," he cried.

"Oh, Roddy, *has* he told you? Or was it Mamma?" said Annie.

"*He* told me, and he did quite right. In Papa's absence I was the right person to be told — next to Mamma, of course." His assumption of dignity touched Annie the more because he looked so very boyish; and she hugged him fondly.

"If you must marry, I'd rather it was him than any other fellow. It's something to be brother-in-law to one of the best shots in England — but I am sorry for —" he broke off and grew red.

"Give Jack my love," said Annie softly, "and tell him I couldn't help it. I know now it never, never could have been anyone but —"

"It's a good thing poor old Jack's going off with me to the Argentine. By the bye, Yorath says he shall bring you out there to see me."

"You stupid boy, that was my idea."

"But I bet when the time comes he'll go to Africa or the Rocky Mountains instead, which reminds me, he is quite against my changing the revolvers, he says they're ripping, so that's all right. And he knows Rawlings, the fellow who came with me to choose them, and thinks no end of him. You should have seen Courtenay's face. He hates Rawlings."

"Where is Courtenay?"

"Under the cedar, doing the civil," said Rodric, looking disgusted. "Of course he rushed up to

titivate as soon as he heard Lady Yorath was here. I wonder he didn't come down in his cap and gown. He's quite capable of it. I left him spouting Latin at her, and she drawing him out like anything. He never sees when people are laughing at him, though the Lord knows I've done my best to show him. I say, we ought to go and look after them all."

"Yes, yes, we ought. But oh, my own old Roddy boy, give me one good hug before we go and tell me you are glad I am so very, very happy. I don't think you half realize what a lucky, lucky girl your sister is."

"I know what a lucky chap he is, anyway," said Roddy, kissing her, "and you needn't think I don't see what an awfully fine match it is for you, Annie. I know *you* wouldn't think of it in that light, but as a man of the world *I* can't be blind to it," said Roddy, looking more like an Eton boy home for the holidays than ever.

"Oh Roddy, you cherub," said Annie. "Of course I should love him just the same if he were a miner like his grandfather, but I can't help being a little glad that he isn't. I wonder if Papa will see it in that light or if he will be — horrid about it."

"He can't help being horrid. It's born in him, poor chap," said Roddy, calmly. "That's why I agree with Granny that the wisest thing I can do is to bunk before he comes back. She believes he'll like me a lot better if I'm not here to aggravate him."

"Why should you aggravate him?" said Annie, indignantly.

"Oh, I don't know. Everything aggravates him. Sometimes I wonder if the poor old buffer's a little inclined to go balmy," said Roddy. An odd emotion made his voice a trifle unsteady. "And yet, do you know, Annie, you'll scarcely believe me, but I've got a kind of sneaking affection for the old governor down in the bottom of my heart. That is when he's not making my blood boil over the way he goes for my mother. Then I can't help letting him know what I feel —"

"You've stood up for her ever since you were a little boy. Perhaps that's why he's more down on you than he is on any of us," said Annie, squeezing his plump arm affectionately. "How I've hated him for it sometimes. And yet, I know what you mean about Papa," she said softly and regretfully. "He's so big and so strong and so handsome, and one would be so proud of him if — if only he were different."

"It's just that. It's not his temper, though he has got a devil of a temper. One wouldn't grudge him a bit of a turn-up all round now and then to work that off. He'd be welcome to take it out of me if that were all. But it's the other things —"

"The — the — meanness," whispered Annie, "the motives he attributes to everybody — the wanting to get the better of everybody —"

"What's the good of going into it all," said Roddy, gloomily. "He was built like it, I suppose."

"And *she* loves him," said Annie; her blue eyes grew thoughtful.

"I suppose he wasn't always — what he is now," said Roddy.

When the Yoraths had gone away, taking Annie with them, Mrs. Kemys went to her own room, and to her favourite seat by the window, looking out over the quiet landscape.

The tumult roused in her heart was not yet stilled.

The romance of Lord Yorath's tender worship of her child, and of Annie's happiness,— had brought back to her, as was natural, memories of other days. Days when she too had basked in the beams of that glorious sun which rises but once in a life-time, lighting so vividly the golden mirage created by desire, that young lovers believe it to be the vision of their future which they behold, lying unveiled before their eager eyes. For Annette the illusion had faded with the passing of those bright far off days; but there remained love — sorrowful, mortified, but unchanging.

Richard's child had come up to that sacred room where her blue eyes had first opened upon the world, and had clasped her mother to her soft breast, and bent her fair head protectingly over that weeping

face. Though Annie was her mother's living image, her personality held something of her father's strength; her features were a thought nobler than her mother's; her eyes a deeper blue.

Annette looked upon her and beheld in her the living embodiment of Richard's love and her own; and for Richard's sake no less than for her own, her heart yearned over her daughter.

She laid her thin hands on either side of the pure lovely face, and gazed into the gay blue eyes.

"The same, yet never the same. You will be his, not mine any more. It is nature. Oh my Annie, thank God he is what he is. Gentle, noble, courteous, kind —"

"I have thanked God for that many times," said Annie, very simply. "But now, Mamma, I want to see *you* smiling. You are not to be crying and sentimentalizing over me. As Papa isn't here to frown at us all, we need not be afraid of showing how happy we are for once. And remember, darling, I shan't be far off even when — when I *do* go to him — for always — oh, Mamma — it sounds too good to be true! — But whatever happens I shall always be your own Annie, your own little girl, just as I have always been."

Now she was gone; that bright embodiment of youth and love and loveliness; and the twilight crept into the corners of the familiar room, changing it mysteriously.

Annette took from her wardrobe a little oval inlaid work box and fitted into the lock a tiny gilt key which hung upon her watch chain.

She rested upon the window seat, with the casket open in her lap; a middle-aged woman, with thin hair parted above a careworn brow; straining her eyes in the failing light to read again the love letters of her youth. There were not so very many after all.

Richard's wooing had been impatient and his courtship brief.

"My own dear sweet little Annette,

"I have just got your letter and I don't know how to thank you for it. I am not worthy of your devotion and never could be, but in a world where I, at least, have never found a true friend, I know how to value it. You are an angel, as true as you are lovely. I know that neither your father nor anyone else could make you disloyal to me. I believe in you absolutely, and love you with all my heart. Come to me soon, darling, and I swear I will make you happy now and always.

"Your own Rex."

That was how he had written to her in her spring-time; and now, in the autumn of life he wrote, "*Dear Annette,*" and denied her the only boon, the just and reasonable boon she had craved from him, before he left her — perhaps for ever. The sound of the last three words rather frightened her.

The room was full of memories of Richard; as he had been, and as he was. She glanced about it uneasily, and remembered that she was deceiving him.

What if he never came back?

But if she had not deceived him, Annie would not have found this great and wonderful good fortune which had come to her.

All fair means she had tried. She had pleaded with him, to be allowed to bring a little brightness, a little gaiety, a little freedom into her child's life, that the chances of happiness in her youth might not be denied her; and Richard had not been moved. He would not have cared though Annie had missed those chances of happiness altogether.

He had been deaf to her petulant demands, and to her mother's meek entreaties; and now, for Annie's sake his wife had fought him in his absence, stealthily — and in the dark; and won the battle she had waged against his selfishness, his indifference, and his shortsightedness to his child's best interests and his own.

And here was Annie come into her kingdom of beauty and womanhood and love; reigning victoriously over the heart of a true man and a noble gentleman.

How could she regret what she had done?

Yet she cried to him in spirit for forgiveness, as she looked fearfully round the darkening room.

Suppose he never came back? How could she bear to go through the rest of her life feeling that she had betrayed the blind confidence he had always reposed

in her absolute devotion; a confidence which had seemed to her sometimes pathetic, for how little he had done to deserve the continued unswerving submission upon which he counted so confidently.

He had strained her endurance almost to breaking point many times, but she had never failed him; and she knew that in his heart he believed in her as he believed in nothing else on earth. How would his faith in all things crumble when he discovered that he had counted in vain upon his wife's loyalty. It was unthinkable. She saw him aroused — incredulous — then his wrath — rising from incredulity to fury — to madness — She shivered not from fear for herself, but for him.

She had chafed beneath his tyranny often; it had robbed her of her spirits, her gaiety, her natural joy in life. It had brought her pain, weariness, disappointment, grief. But the disquiet had come from without, not from within.

Her soul had remained calm, her conscience clear; of her peace of mind Richard's tyranny had never been able to rob her.

Now her soul was troubled within her; the sin of her deception lay heavily upon her conscience and through her own action her peace of mind was gone.

"I have tasted of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and it has made me in love with innocence," she sighed, and kissed the little worn love letter she held, for the sake of the days when it had told the truth.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. CANTRILL AT ST. NEVYNS

MR. TURLEY sat opposite his old friend and client in the garden of the cottage, where Howell had laid out a little tea-table in the shade of the lilacs.

Old Mrs. Kemys in her mushroom hat, and wrapt in her spotless shawl,—enjoyed nothing more than a quiet talk over her tea with her contemporary; and his visits had increased in frequency since Richard's absence, as her pleasure in them had also increased.

Mr. Turley was in the habit of receiving quite as much advice from old Mrs. Kemys as he gave; but even this fact did not act as a deterrent. He had fallen into the habit of driving over to Llanon when he had shut up his office, on a fine afternoon, to enjoy, as he said, the pure air of the hills.

At this season of the year the damp mists were less prevalent, or at least only rose with the fall of night.

He walked his old horse up the steep ascent, and put up his trap at the Kemys Arms, that ancient hostelry that stood opposite the ramparts which enclosed the cottage and its little plot of garden from view.

The villagers smiled when they saw him come out

of the stable-yard, and walk across the road to the green door in that great ivy-covered wall.

They said to each other that if the pair had been a score of years younger there would have been a match; and that Lawyer Turley ought to have got married years ago, since all the world knew he had made a good bit of money; and who was he saving it for, after all?

He was very much respected in Llysdinam, and indeed all over the neighbourhood; and the inhabitants of Llanon liked to welcome him among them; a brisk little figure with low-crowned hat and trim white whiskers, carrying always a neat umbrella, and wearing always an overcoat and a silk kerchief wrapped about his throat, for he was subject to bronchitis, and took great care of himself. Old Mrs. Kemys, who sat out of doors in all weathers, never had tea brought out on to the lawn without first ascertaining whether he thought the day sufficiently warm.

On this particular evening it was so warm that he discarded the silk handkerchief, folding it carefully and bestowing it in the pocket of his coat, which he wore unbuttoned.

"Ah, my dear lady," he said, observing a smile on the face of his hostess, "you think that on such a May-day as this, even an old fellow need not trouble to wear a neck-cloth driving. But I know my own constitution, and I have one motto, which

has preserved my health and happiness, and that is, *wrop up the toobs.*"

The younger members of the Kemys family had often laughed at this motto, or at the lawyer's pronunciation of it, but old Mrs. Kemys protested.

"If I laughed, it was not at your silk comforter, but because I am in such good spirits. I could not help dropping you a line at once."

"Well, well, well! But I suppose it is all a dead secret, eh?" said Mr. Turley, drawing his seat closer to the wheel-chair, and chuckling.

"Not a soul is to know anything about it, of course, until my son has signified his consent. Except Mrs. Byewater, who had to be told in confidence, or she would have been spreading her surmises all over the neighbourhood."

Neither of the speakers made any pretence to lower their voices, though Howell was hovering over the tea-table pouring out the tea, and handing the hot cakes she had made specially for Mr. Turley.

The idea of attempting to keep a secret from Howell, if it ever existed, had been dismissed from the mind of old Mrs. Kemys thirty or forty years ago. The discreet handmaiden hardly troubled to listen to the conversation of her mistress with her guests; so certain was she of hearing it again in every detail before she had finished putting the old lady to bed.

"Well, I should suppose the consent can only be a matter of form. Miss Annie has carried off the

greatest *parti* in the country," said the old gentleman, pleasantly.

"One would suppose Richard might be satisfied," said Mrs. Kemys, drily, "but who can prophesy what would satisfy Richard? That will do, Howell, we have all we want, and Mr. Turley can do the rest of the waiting on himself; you have fidgetted about quite enough."

"Now that we are alone," said Mr. Turley, when the spare, black-clad form of the sour-faced but dignified maiden had disappeared round the corner of the cottage, "I should like to hear what you think of *her* — of Annette herself."

Mrs. Kemys shook her head.

"She grows whiter and thinner, and sadder every day," she said, emphatically. "What has become of her old spirit it is difficult to say."

"Broken," said the lawyer, shortly.

"Not that, or she would never have had the courage to act as she has done. Lord, in her place I should be chuckling from morning till night. Look at the change that has come over Nantgwilt! Here is young Roddy safely started off in the best of spirits with Jack Meredydd —"

"With excellent prospects," said the lawyer emphatically. "I remember John Meredydd, a different kind of man from his brother, the parson, but if I had a son I know no one to whom I'd rather confide him."

"Yes, yes. Annette is convinced of that, and that

Roddy will be far happier out there than in the City. She has no fears for Roddy. And as for Annie, the child's good fortune passes belief. As I say, instead of the old gloom and restlessness and discontent in the Manor House there has been a regular wave of brightness come over the children's lives since — in plain English, since poor Richard took himself off. Look at Sophy; she is a different creature, goes about singing at the top of her voice. Out of tune, but what does that signify? Corney doing as well as possible at school, poor little fellow, and Manuel taken at last to London to be examined by a specialist, the course I have urged upon Richard for the last two years."

"What is the result?"

"Just what I expected. He has taken the first steps along the way poor little Lucy went. Why — is a mystery. There never was any consumption in *our* families, nor, so far as Annette is aware, in hers. But Dr. Harries says Manuel has too feeble a constitution to stand the mists of this basin among the hills in autumn and winter."

"What is to be done?"

"The London doctor says a couple of months at Davos will not only arrest, but he believes actually cure the disease; it has hardly developed. He is to be sent off at once to Switzerland, with a trained nurse. Old Sharman has come back from town, where Lady Yorath has found another maid for Annie, and she is to take them out there, and settle

them. I don't suppose she will be able to stop, but Manuel is too nervous to be sent off alone with a stranger."

"Why does not his mother take him? It would do her all the good in the world."

"She is afraid. She is not telling Richard, or she would have a cable forbidding it. You know he never would consent to poor little Lucy's going. He thinks changes of climate all nonsense. No. Annette remains on duty at Nantgwilt, and writes from here and tells him — nothing. He will have —" she laughed sardonically, "quite a series of pleasant surprises on his return."

"Perhaps little Manuel's break-down would account for her depression," said Mr. Turley, shaking his head.

"I don't think so. She has never taken a despondent view. She came back from London much more cheerful than she went; the specialist was so hopeful. As she said — to be able to do *something* is always a comfort. To have to sit still and do nothing is heartrending. But everything possible will be done. The doctor said the boy might go to school later at Brighton or some bracing seaside place. No, no, it is not the anxiety about little Manuel that is weighing her down. It is the prospect of facing Richard — on his return. Think of the money she has spent — perhaps she has been almost too reckless, — or you in supplying her."

"My dear lady," said Mr. Turley, with a grim

smile, "I hold ample security for every penny I have advanced."

"So I supposed. Still, Richard has all his wits about him —"

"Perhaps he has outwitted himself for once," said the lawyer, drily.

"If he can get out of repaying you he will," she said, with some uneasiness.

"You may leave me to take care of myself."

"Well — of course I am quite in the dark. Annette thought it best I should be able to say I knew nothing about it."

"Much the best."

"You see, he could punish me by keeping my grandchildren away." Suddenly her voice broke. "Sometimes I think I have been mad to urge her to defy him; for God knows he will punish *her* when he returns."

"She is, happily, in a position to dictate terms," said Mr. Turley, and the light of battle shone from his small keen eyes, "and I am at her back. I will save her from her own weakness."

"Have you thought — forgive me, what her position would be if — if anything —"

"If anything happened to me? Oh, dear, yes," said Mr. Turley cheerfully. "It was the very first thing I thought of. Richard Kemys will have to reckon with some very much more important legal luminaries than I — if it pleases God to remove me before his return."

"That is a comfort," said Mrs. Kemys.

"Your remark is not complimentary," he said, laughing, "but I am glad to relieve your mind even at the cost of a blow to my own vanity."

Mrs. Kemys apologised.

"I did not mean it in that sense. Well — then the only remaining trouble is that I should like to see Annie safely married before his return."

"So many of your wishes have been accomplished that you need not despair," he said, "and I think I may tell you, in confidence, that Lady Yorath is very much of your mind on that point."

"No one could have behaved more charmingly than she has over the whole matter," said Mrs. Kemys, warmly. "She came here on her way home, and said very pretty things to me of Annie. I took it very kind of her and uncommonly civil, for most mothers rather stand in the way of their sons' marrying than help them to it."

"She has known some lonely years," said the lawyer, shaking his head. "I fancy, apart from her liking for Miss Annie, that she longs to see him settled in his home before the wandering life gets hold of him for good and all. He is in his thirtieth year, you know, and if anything happens to him — why, there is no one to come after him. Small wonder if she pines for some little Yoraths. And depend upon it, if she is allowing a short time to elapse now before the fulfilment of her wishes, it is for a very

good reason. Miss Annie will know her way about all the better, for having had a preliminary peep into the great world with so clever a woman as Lady Yorath to guide her. Well, well. I wish the young lady every happiness; but when all is said and done she will never be so pretty as I remember her mother."

"That is a point on which we never agree," said the old lady, pursing up her lips.

Sophy had perhaps reasons of her own for being in such good spirits that she was inspired to raise her tuneless voice and sing, as she moved through the dark rooms of the old Manor House; with her flaxen hair taking golden lights from the sunshine that streamed through the open windows, and her plump pink and white face beaming with pleasure and energy.

In Annie's absence she could take the initiative to her heart's content; and since her mother's watchfulness had relaxed strangely of late, Sophy had picked up the dropped reins of household government, and now held them securely in her own capable white hands. Mrs. Sharman protested, but what could she do? She was on the eve of departing to Switzerland with her beloved youngest nurseling; and had been away so many weeks that her authority had lost much of its weight.

She attempted remonstrance with her lady, but

Mrs. Kemys only smiled vaguely, and was not to be roused to take action, nor to check the forwardness of her child.

"Miss Sophy takes too much upon herself, ma'am, and the whole house is talking about it. Even the outdoor folk puts in their word. There is nothing done, indoor or out, but what she knows it."

"What can I do, Sharman? The child is a child no longer. She is nearly eighteen. She will take her sister's place as eldest daughter at home."

"Miss Annie was very different. When did she think to interfere in the store-room and kitchen, far less the stables? What would her Papa say?"

"I am afraid he will have something to say about a good many things when he comes back," said Mrs. Kemys, with a melancholy smile.

"*I'm* not afraid of facing him, for one," said Sharman, but her ruddy face paled, and she forgot Sophy's misdemeanours for the moment. "Oh, ma'am, I hope you're well-advised," she said under her breath, "you don't need me to tell you what Mr. Richard can be, when he's angered."

"No, Sharman."

"Miss Annie and all, it must have cost you a deal of money. To be sure, nothing's too good for her, and when I think what it's led to — and her making this splendid marriage, I wouldn't have the heart to blame any lady that went against her husband for *that*; since we all know gentlemen never troubles

themselves to think how a young lady is to get a husband — but —”

“For what, then, would you have the heart to blame me, dear Sharman, if not for that? For giving my boy his start in life, who should be the heir to this great property, and would have been forced to borrow money from the parson’s son for his very outfit —”

“God forbid Master Roddy should lack anything, and him going to the end of the world,” said Sharman, beginning to cry.

“What is it you grudge, then, Sharman? Is it little Corney’s cricket-bat and flannels, that sent him off to school happy, instead of crying; or Courtenay’s books that are to help his work at College; or the new chintz for Sophy’s bedroom? These are not necessities, I know, like the other things I have bought, for God knows my children had scarce clothes to their backs; but they help to make their young lives happy and their home pleasant to them. Or is it that you blame me for trying to save my baby’s life? Lucy’s little brother, whom she is calling to follow her into the world of shadows,” said Mrs. Kemys softly. “For sending little Manuel away with his old nurse to look for health among the Swiss mountains. You’re not blaming me for that?”

“Oh, ma’am, how could you think it? What else could you do? But I’ll bring him back to you well and strong,” said Sharman sobbing.

"I haven't spent anything on myself, Sharman. That is the only shred of excuse — the forlorn bit of comfort I offer to my own conscience. Look at me. I am as shabby as I ever was. I looked in the shops in London, and thought what I could buy to make myself more like Lady Yorath, who looks ten years younger than I. I saw how much might be done, even though her face is not faded, nor her hair grown thin like mine —"

"She never had seven children to rob her of her looks," said Sharman, with homely directness. "If she wants to see what you was, let her look at Miss Annie. You've given her your beautiful gold hair, ma'am, and you don't grudge it neither. Howell and me had words on that very subject lately. She's that proud of her thread-paper waist, and casts it up to me, as I'm a bit stouter than I could wish to be. 'But, Howell,' I says to her, 'if there's one thing in this world more pitiful than another it's to hear a woman as has never borne children boasting to one as has, that she's kept her figure —'"

"Dear Sharman, I wish you would not quarrel with Howell."

"Life would be very dull, ma'am, if one never had a word with anyone," said Sharman, excusing herself. "It's she as casts the pepper at me before I throws the mustard back. And if it comes to that, ma'am," dexterously changing the conversation, "I wish you *had* got yourself a few new things. With Miss Sophy rigged out like a princess, and new cov-

ers for the drawing-room chairs, it's hard you can't have a new gown to your back, if you'll excuse me, ma'am. Though I'll not deny we must save somewhere, with the way the money's been poured out lately," she said, with a sigh in which awe and curiosity were mingled. "Only when it comes to putting the cottages in order as could very well wait till the master comes home —"

"And how much longer would they have to wait? Do you know the water came through the roof on to the bed where old Gwyn Godden slept — would you have me buy myself gowns before I attended to that?"

"I know, ma'am," said Sharman, in subdued tones. "But as Pugh says, once you begin where are you going to end? There's lots of the cottages in a dreadful state, but it don't pay to put them right, and he's shaking in his shoes at the thought of what the master will say when he comes home. If it wasn't as Mr. Richard told him himself he was to go to you for orders and not to Mr. Machon, he'd have gone to ask Mr. Machon about it. Not to go against you, but because he's so feared for all the expense you're going to, and thinks as being a lady you're not responsible like. But as it is, he's doing his best to keep the goings-on at the cottages away from Mr. Machon's knowledge, on account of his letter from the Squire that he wouldn't have no interference from that quarter. Luckily, Pugh has kept the letter to remind the master what his orders

was. But for all that he's that upset he says he can't hardly sleep at night, and only for knowing Mr. Turley is advising you, he would take and write to the Squire himself."

"I will take care that neither Pugh nor Mr. Machon nor anyone else knows where to write," said Annette.

Sharman departed with little Manuel, in company with the trained nurse, who exhibited all the tact that could be desired by making fast friends with the old woman before she attempted to gain the much more easily won affections of the little boy.

Manuel was so elated at the prospect of a journey to Switzerland that he forgot his lamentations for his brother's absence, and showed no more feeling in leaving his mother than a child of his age usually does under such circumstances.

Mrs. Kemys and Sophy went to the station to see him off, and as the train departed he waved his sailor hat ecstatically; his great blue eyes shining, and his little transparent face all flushed and smiling with excitement. It was old Sharman who shed tears at parting, not little Manuel.

"It's always the same," said the sympathetic nurse to the old woman, "we eat our hearts out for them, and they don't know, and don't care."

"Who would wish them to know? Not I, God bless them," said Sharman, and she kissed the reluctant Manuel passionately.

Thus, since Courtenay had returned to Oxford, only Sophy and her mother, of all the family, now remained at the Manor House.

"My dear, it will be very dull for you," said Annette, wondering at the brightness of Sophy's face. Sophy, who was given to complainings, and had been, of all her children, the discontented one.

"No, Mamma, I am never dull. There is always something to do. And I do not at all mind being alone. Everybody has always been considered before me; so that now I am the only one left to be considered, you may suppose I enjoy getting my turn at last. You will see, the new covers for the drawing-room will all be finished before Annie comes home. She will hardly know the place. And our bedroom will be another surprise for her. She will find it quite as nice as the one she had at Artramont; for since you let me get the muslin and ribbon I wanted I have found it quite easy to do the dressing-table as she described, and the new curtains are lovely. Of course an oak-panelled room can never look as bright as a nice new wall-paper," said Sophy, calmly, "but it is wonderful what a little muslin and ribbon will do."

Sophy was herself a living example of this wonder. She now presented a dainty picture, very unlike the discontented maiden in the washed-out blue cotton frock, who had grumbled, and gone primrosing, and carried the baskets.

Since Annie had appeared with her hair dressed in

a new and wonderful manner suggested by Lady Yorath's clever French maid, Sophy had not been slow to imitate her. Now her own flaxen tresses were waved and widened above her piquant little fair face.

Her gown was white and fresh, and trimly buckled with blue ribbon about her dainty waist. She wore the smartest little neat shoes.

Even if she had had no other cause for happiness, the contemplation of herself in the glass would have brought smiles to Sophy's face.

She was industrious and house-proud, and loved to decorate the rooms in which she lived; but still better did she love to decorate her own little person.

It was no wonder that Mr. Cantrill, returning to spend a few days with the rector, in order to complete the sketches he was making of the tombs in the old church — thought Sophy the prettiest and most bewitching creature he had ever beheld.

He was a gentle and gentlemanly clergyman, possessed of a pair of fine brown eyes that expressed only kindness and simplicity, a brown moustache and beard which hid the weakness of his mouth and chin, and a disposition so sensitive that if anyone contradicted him in the daytime he was apt to lie awake and think of it all night.

That he had remained a bachelor so long was due probably to the fact that he possessed also a very energetic and devoted sister, who lived with him, and directed him both in house and parish, guarding him

carefully from designing young females. She would certainly have called Sophy a designing young female, and guarded her brother from her attractions, save for the fact that her own attention was now exclusively occupied elsewhere.

In other words a great and astounding piece of good fortune had befallen Mr. Cantrill's sister, in her own estimation, and that of all her acquaintance.

Her brother's bishop, making a tour of his diocese spent a couple of nights with the well-to-do vicar of Gwenfrood, and was struck by Miss Cantrill's marvellous powers of administration, no less than by the beauty of her brown eyes, and the cheerfulness of her smile.

The bishop was elderly, and the bishop was failing in strength. Miss Cantrill was middle-aged, and her strength was super-abundant.

He invited the brother and sister to pay a return visit to his episcopal residence. Here he had a further opportunity of discovering good qualities in the lady whose capabilities and energy had attracted him so greatly at first sight.

At a local football match a little boy, climbing an iron stack of forbidden hurdles, managed to displace them, and fell with them to the ground. When he was extricated, it was discovered that he had broken his leg. It was Miss Cantrill who cut off his stocking and boot, rendered first aid to the injured limb, and soothed the little sufferer. The deftness, and

above all, the tenderness that she displayed, dispelled the bishop's last doubt. He proposed to Miss Cantrill that evening.

He was nearly seventy, but he was a bishop, and a worthy one. She revered him, and she had never had an offer of marriage in her life. Miss Cantrill accepted him gratefully, and wondered what would become of her brother.

He left the curate in charge of his parish, which was a large one; and went abroad for a change, feeling the parsonage too melancholy without his sister's presence. On his return he found it more melancholy still. To cheer himself, he made frequent expeditions into the surrounding country to indulge his solitary hobby of sketching tombs and rubbing brasses. He had welcomed the opportunity of visiting Llanon.

His sister had been married just six weeks when he fell in love with Sophy Kemys. Perhaps he instinctively recognised in her some of the sustaining qualities which characterized the bishop's wife.

Sophy — in the absence of her elder sister — enjoyed taking the lead. She was quick and decided, and withal she was young and pretty. Also her manner had that touch of deference which was to be expected towards one so many years her senior.

She was excessively tired of playing second fiddle, and it elated her to perceive that her word was law to Mr. Cantrill.

Sophy became very much interested in rubbing the

old brasses in the church of St. Nevyn. He showed her that one represented a miner of the 15th century with his equipment, and another a forester of the same period, and she was charmed. She learnt for the first time that there was much to admire in the mural frescoes she had faced with perfect indifference every Sunday for the past fourteen years of her life. And she acquired, if possible, an even greater value in the eyes of Mr. Cantrill, because she was the direct descendant of the old Emmanuel Kemys whose dust lay beneath one of the finest fourteenth century altar-tombs he had ever had the good fortune to behold.

Cynthia Byewater and her sister Perina watched his broad figure, surmounted by his wide clerical hat — bending towards his little companion as he crossed the churchyard by her side, carrying his sketching materials.

They looked at each other and said no word, and each read the thought in the other's heart. *Even that little chit has a lover now.* For they had reached the age when it appeared to them, too, that

“Babes make love and children wed.”

They were not jealous of Annie. Whatever their mother might say or think, Cynthia and Perina rejoiced over the romance of her sudden engagement to Lord Yorath. Her beauty had this effect upon

them, that they were glad all the world should have the chance of recognising it. They did not grudge her happiness to Annie. But it is to be feared that they grudged Mr. Cantrill to Sophy very much indeed.

They said to each other almost reproachfully that it was a wonder some more suitable person had not taken the trouble to cut out this little minx who was still in her teens, and who would certainly make the least desirable wife in the world for a nervous middle-aged, well-to-do clergyman.

CHAPTER XVII

CYNTHIA AND PERINA GROWN UP

THE rumour that old Mrs. Byewater had had a stroke had scarcely spread through the village of Llanon, before it was followed by the news of her death.

Everyone was shocked and sympathetic, as the members of a small community generally are when death appears suddenly in their midst.

It was scarcely remembered for the time being, that the old lady had been rather disliked than otherwise in Llanon; the villagers forgot to smile when they mentioned the "young ladies."

The most sincere commiseration for them both was expressed and felt.

It was the flowery season, between late spring and early summer; and the old crooked, stone-tiled roof of the Red House was literally embowered in blossom. The garden slope, with its view of the valley and the distant blue hills, which lay at the back of the little dwelling, was buried in bloom.

The maiden sisters had worked there long and silently during autumn and winter. Now was the reward of their labours.

And in an upper chamber with the window open

towards the village street, which the dead woman had loved to look upon so much more than she had loved the misty beautiful view of the hills at the back — lay the old mother.

The village children, whom the “young ladies” taught in Sunday School, came silently to the door, which stood open, and thrust bunches of cowslips and uneven wreaths of wild violets and ferns into the hands of the little sobbing maid-servant, who had hated her mistress living, and now cried the more bitterly because she was dead, and because, being young, she was easily affected by the grief of others.

The day after their mother’s death, Cynthia and Perina sent a message to Mrs. Kemys, and she came instantly to the darkened house which had been her early home, and to which she had been summoned once before, on just such a perfect summer day — to her father’s death-bed.

She expected to find the sisters helpless, overcome, perhaps hysterical, for old Mrs. Byewater had treated them almost as children to the very end. But she found them calm, self-possessed and even dignified in their grief; it was as though they had suddenly and with great relief, permitted themselves to grow up, since the unnatural compulsion to remain young had been removed. Annette wondered if after all, the comedy the village had enjoyed so long had not been a very patiently and silently borne martyrdom to two of the actors concerned in it.

They spoke in whispers, and moved noiselessly,

as people do when there is death in the house; but it was as though they had not been unprepared.

"Dear Mamma was much, much older than anybody guessed," whispered Cynthia. "She was so active — so interested in everything. She kept her youth to the last."

"Will you come upstairs?" said Perina, in the same hushed tones. "She was fond of you. I think she would have wished you to come."

Cynthia appeared a little uneasy, but the younger and more decided sister prevailed.

"Are you sure — dear Mamma would have wished — of course there is a great change —" faltered Cynthia.

"Yes, she would have wished it. If she could have known how exquisite she would look," said Perina, firmly.

Annette, in the midst of her sympathy, wondered that even the simplicity of the middle-aged daughters could have found old Mrs. Byewater exquisite. But when she reached that silent bower under the steep roof of her old home, she wondered no longer.

There lay among the white coverings the dignified sleeping face of an old, old woman; with snow-white hair parted above a brow from which death had smoothed the wrinkles and left only the peace; — the meekness of one who had resigned pretence for ever.

"She was past eighty — poor Mamma — but she wished nobody to know it," whispered Perina, re-

placing tenderly the lawn handkerchief which covered the face that was almost the face of a stranger to Annette. She could not bear to recall, in that majestic presence, the simpering, chattering, painted, auburn-wigged creature which Mrs. Byewater had chosen to show to the world as her true self.

"Do you think we need put the date of her birth—in the announcement—or on her—on her tomb?" Cynthia whispered.

They turned anxious eyes on Mrs. Kemys.

"We do not mind *your* knowing, dear Mrs. Kemys, but we do not wish everybody to know."

"No, no; I do not think you need. The date of her death would be quite, quite sufficient," said Annette, with tears in her eyes.

As she took the short cut across the churchyard to the Manor House on her way home, the sound of the wheelwright's hammering went echoing up the valley, and she knew that he was making old Mrs. Byewater's coffin; and again she realised poignantly the mingling of homely commonplace and everlasting tragedy which is the sum of human life.

Mr. Turley and Dr. Harries were the executors appointed by the deceased, and the former showed a great deal of kindness to the forlorn ladies in the Red House, who were perfectly ignorant of business, but most anxious to learn anything he chose to teach them.

He found they had never even learned how to

draw a cheque, and that they knew nothing of their mother's affairs.

"Poor Mamma liked to keep everything entirely to herself," they explained. "We did not even know what her income was. We knew she was badly off, but we always thought she was too proud, poor Mamma — to let anyone know how poor she really was. We are prepared to hear we may have to live in a different style — to keep a smaller establishment," they said humbly.

Mr. Turley thought it would have been difficult to keep a much smaller establishment. There was the usual old servant, who had acted as Mrs. Byewater's maid; and the little local girl-of-all-work.

"We know dear Mamma — as an officer's widow, had a pension which dies with her," they said, sadly.

"My dear young ladies," said Mr. Turley (from force of habit), "I am happy to tell you — I am *very* happy to tell you, that your mother insured her life for your benefit many years ago. No doubt the yearly payment of the premium crippled her expenditure, and she did not care to let you know of the sacrifice she was making for you. You will be considerably better off than during her life-time. She was insured for no less a sum than ten thousand pounds. You will have therefore five thousand apiece in addition to your pensions, and the income which she has devoted to the payment of the premium."

Mr. Turley did not know why the two sisters

looked at each other as though conscience-stricken; but he respected the emotion that overcame them, and busied himself with his papers until they had recovered themselves sufficiently to attend to him.

When he had gone, the gentle Cynthia laid her head upon the table and wept.

“Oh, Perry, Perry, I have thought poor Mamma was neglectful of our interests, that it was cruel of her to leave Cheltenham when my father died, and to bury us here in the country.”

“I never could understand it, never,” said Perina, in choking tones. “She who loved society and — and gossip and intercourse with her neighbours, and never cared for country life; but I see now, she could not afford to live in Cheltenham — as we had been living —”

“She must have given up all hopes of our marrying, and determined to provide for us in this way instead,” sobbed Cynthia.

Perina knelt beside her sister and put a protecting arm about the bowed and rounded shoulders.

“Cynthia, listen. We have never really liked this place. If it had not been for the garden, — and the choir — I don’t know how we could have stood it. I see now why Mamma only rented this house by the year, and would not have a lease. She never expected nor wished us to stay after she died. She has given us the means to go where we like — back to Cheltenham — anywhere.”

“Never back to Cheltenham. We were still able to enjoy the dances and the gaieties — when we left. What could we do there now — after twenty years? It would be full of ghosts. And poor Papa forgotten who was so much respected —”

“You are right. It would be too sad,” said Perina, after a moment’s pause, during which her fancy had wandered backwards to the scene of past triumphs, and blighted hopes. “But we will not stay here, Cynthia. We are no longer young but we are not old. We are active and able to enjoy whatever life may have in store for us still. Poor Mamma has given us the means; we will go abroad — we will travel.”

“Oh Perry! would it be possible? It has been the dream of my life,” Cynthia said, raising her face with the tears yet wet upon her pale eyelashes.

“It would be possible. It is even the proper thing to do, after such a bereavement as ours. We will give up the Red House; store such things as we could not bear to part with, and sell the rest. And we will go first to London and get proper mourning, and then we will go abroad. It will be the best and happiest thing for us.”

“Oh Perry, I might look forward to it, even now — if only I had not to reproach myself for never understanding what poor Mamma’s devotion to us must have been —”

“How could we guess? She told us nothing. It

is something that we understand now, and are grateful. And perhaps she knows," said Perina, in subdued tones.

The sun was high and the heat great. Annette left the bench beneath the cedar where Sophy chattered over her work and sauntered away, carrying a book in her hand.

She had never acquired the habit of reading, or had never had time to indulge this taste if she possessed it; but she often took a book now as an excuse for seeking solitude.

It seemed to those who observed her that she grew languid and listless. With the necessity for exertion the power of exerting herself seemed to be vanishing; also she became frailer and more delicate in appearance.

Her days and nights were haunted by the insistent ghost of self-reproach; a spirit not always to be laid even by the vision of the freedom and happiness her children had gained in return for the sacrifice of her peace of mind.

She had truly said to Sharman that her little shred of consolation was the thought that in no way had her recent doings brought her any personal benefit. Rigidly she clung to her shabby gowns, her meagre fare; and woman-like, endeavoured passionately to salve her conscience by starving and denying herself, whilst liberally pouring forth the benefits she regarded as stolen benefits, upon those she loved.

She had abandoned, in the despair of bewilderment, all hope of convincing herself by argument of the right or wrong of the course she was pursuing. But she believed that from the moment she had accepted the first advance of money from Mr. Turley, she had burnt her boats; and this very conviction brought the relief which such a conviction generally brings to a weak or undecided nature.

But having thus committed herself to a course she deplored,—yet could not altogether regret,—she made what amends she could within the bounds of its pursuit; and believing that she robbed Richard, applied the proceeds of the theft towards the removal of many reproaches from his name.

She urged forward the repairs of the neglected cottages with an energy almost feverish; and righted a dozen petty wrongs which had rankled in the bosoms of her humbler neighbours for years. A disputed right of way—a water grievance—a bitter complaint of encroachment on ancient common rights—she was astounded by the ease with which these and similar troubles were smoothed from the path of the owners of Nantgwilt present and to come, by a liberal pouring forth of ready money.

Old Pugh, in spite of his misgivings, admired his mistress for the first time.

“She’s got the old Colonel’s spirit after all,” he said to Pryse. “If Squire never came back at all, and left her to manage the place, she’d be served twice as well as ever he was. A man as is hated like

the Squire's hated, is never well served, let him bully and screw as he will."

"There's a day of reckoning to come," said Pryse, shaking his head. "We'll have to pay before winter sets in for the peace and quiet of this here summer. The household books is higher at this minute, with all Miss Sophy is pleased to order, than when the lot of them was at home. And all in case Mr. Cantrill might drop in. She can't blind me. Not that I'm blaming her. Eating and drinking is the last thing I'd care to economize over. We must eat to live as everyone knows."

"It's something to be able to face the folk in the Glyn," said Pugh. "I don't say they're all contented. Some people that has enjoyed a grievance for twenty years can't hardly bear to part with it. But there's one or two — I used to be ashamed to tell them as I couldn't get the Squire to do nothing. And after all, *my* conscience is clear, if they *do* bless her name," he argued, "for the Squire wrote me to take my orders from *her*. So 'tis she that must bear the brunt when he comes home. But the work will be done by then at this rate, and it can't well be undone, since it's been paid for — storm as he will."

"There'll be no one but her to storm at, with all this scattering of the family," said Pryse. "I sometimes ask myself whether I'm awake or asleep, when I sees her moving like a ghost through the empty rooms. Even Sharman gone, as one did think was a fixture; and no one to keep the missus company but

Miss Sophy, as is dancing after her gentleman all day, and would like to be off with him altogether as anyone can see. No wonder madam frets, left all to herself."

But it was not because she was left to herself that Mrs. Kemys fretted.

On the contrary, she found something of her lost serenity restored when she could steal away thus to commune with herself in silence. For solitude, like nature, rewards her worshippers with an ever fuller and deeper understanding of her charms and of her mysteries.

Annette took her way slowly through the garden, and let herself out by the little iron gate in the fence, leading into the meadows.

Her gown swished through the tall bending grasses that almost hid the narrow path; grasses already flowering, among branching ox-eyed daisies, and buttercups of the golden hearts.

Little red and blue butterflies fluttered across her way, and high above her head sounded the lark's song though the singer was invisible.

The larch woods looked inviting, but they sloped away down to the valley, and she thought of the return climb; choosing to skirt the palings of the garden and shrubberies, until she reached an outlying orchard hidden by a curve of the hill.

The orchard was a rough one, dipping into unexpected hollows and little dells, where in spring the finest primroses and sweetest white violets lurked,

and where now the bluebells were scattered among the springing fronds of bracken.

She chose a resting-place sheltered by a grove of stunted oak on one side, and on the other by a grass hillock, sparsely crowned with gnarled apple-trees, which stood out boldly, bearing their alien branches of green mistletoe against the dazzling blue of the summer sky.

Below her blazed a clump of golden gorse, and at her back rose a mountain ash. She leant against its smooth trunk, and gazed at the distant landscape shrouded in haze; the sunlight cast emerald lights upon her white face, through the great leaves of a tall budding foxglove, and through a giant bush of wild fern fanned by the warm breeze.

From the shady depths of the oak grove sounded cheerful twittering. A little brown bird stretched his throat in ecstatic trill from a perch on a tall pear-tree, while his brothers soared into the boundless blue of space.

What a quiet world of remoteness, and calm and beauty. If only the mind could be attuned to its sleepy harmony.

Presently she hardly knew whether her dreams were waking ones, or whether she had lost herself in slumber.

She had been thinking of the Red House, now empty, and therefore seeming much more like her old home than when the Byewaters had transmogrified its sacred interior by their belongings.

The house, like most of the dwellings in Llanon, belonged to the lord of the manor of Nantgwilt.

Annette had gone through it that morning with old Pugh, and said that she would take no steps towards finding a new tenant until the Squire's return. The empty rooms haunted her imagination so that it was no wonder that she should dream of them still, waking or sleeping.

She thought of herself standing in the window recess of the little sitting-room, looking into the garden at the brilliant scarlet of the rhododendron now in flower there. The scarlet took form, and she realised her father in full uniform, as she had once seen him dressed for a levée. He held out his arms to her, and said, with that well-remembered tender intonation so familiar to her, "*It's time to come home, Annette*"; and the presentment was so vivid that she started and stumbled to her feet with a cry.

Her heart was beating rapidly, and though she tried to laugh as at a nightmare, she felt in reality as though she had had a warning vision, as incomplete and puzzling as such visions usually are.

She looked at her watch, and found she had been resting for an hour. Then she must have slept. A shrill voice was calling her, and she forgot her dream in her haste to get away from her secret refuge.

She was nearing the gate in the iron fence, when she saw Sophy running in the garden.

"Mr. Cantrill is in the drawing-room, Mamma. He asked for you, and Pugh said you were at home,

thinking you were in the garden. He told Pryse he wished to see you very particularly," cried Sophy, "so I came to look for you instead of going to entertain him myself. But I hunted everywhere and could not find you,"

Sophy's tones were reproachful, and Mrs. Kemys felt almost guilty when she remembered the elaborate pains she had taken to hide herself.

"I am coming at once, my dear," she said. Then she became aware that Sophy was unusually flushed and excited; and looking at her in surprise observed the conscious, almost the triumphant expression of her face.

"Sophy!" she cried.

But Sophy turned and fled.

Mrs. Kemys hurried into the drawing-room, where she found Mr. Cantrill bending over the carving of the pillars which supported the mantel-board, with curious interest. He appeared to recollect himself and his errand with a start, as he came forward to greet his hostess.

After a few moments of intense embarrassment, during which they both talked almost passionately of the weather, he suddenly calmed; and in his most old-fashioned manner asked Annette's permission to marry her daughter.

He anticipated her objection to his age before she had time to make any answer to his opening speech, for the simple reason that he had rehearsed this conversation to himself in bed for many nights, and felt

acutely that he must not give her the chance to make any remark for which he had not prepared a crushing or convincing reply.

He pointed out that although he was most undoubtedly twenty years older than Sophy, there was a much greater discrepancy of age between his sister and her bishop.

"Yet I defy you to show me a happier couple," said Mr. Cantrill, simply. "They are never contented out of each other's sight. Of course I am not a bishop. But my position is a good one. That is to say I have a good living, and a private fortune of my own, and I am prepared to settle everything I have in the world upon her."

"My dear Mr. Cantrill," said Mrs. Kemys, at last succeeding in making herself heard, "you are going too fast. We have not yet arrived—" she smiled in spite of herself—"at Sophy's marriage-settlements. You must recollect that this is the first I have heard of your affection for my daughter, and that I look upon Sophy as a child."

"I know you do, I know it. She has told me so. I think it a mistake, if you will permit me to say so. She tells me she will be eighteen this month."

Mrs. Kemys could not deny the fact.

"I believe you were not much older when you became the mother of your son—" he said, timidly, and altogether unaware that it was Sophy who had artlessly supplied him with this argument.

Again Mrs. Kemys had no contradiction to offer.

"Parents are often inclined to — to forget their children grow up," he said with his gentle smile. "I assure you if you could hear your daughter talk to me — knowing as she does that I regard her as a woman — you would be very much surprised."

"I think it not unlikely," said Annette, and a faint smile played about the corners of her mouth. "Have you — spoken to her? But of course —"

"I have not put the actual question, at least, not in so many words," he stammered. "It seemed right — taking her youth into consideration, to await your permission for that. But I think I may say, without presumption, that we understand each other."

Then he fortunately forgot the remainder of his preconcerted remarks, and spoke with natural emotion.

"If you will give me your child, Mrs. Kemys, I will do my utmost, my very utmost, to make her happy. I am a very lonely man, now that my sister is married. I know my age is a drawback, but on the other hand it would make me perhaps more considerate and indulgent than a younger man; who might be more suitable, but could not be more devoted."

Mrs. Kemys liked him a great deal better when his unnatural pomposity melted into his natural simplicity.

She could not, she said, consent to a definite engagement until Sophy's father returned, or while

Sophy was quite so young; but of course, if they both remained of the same mind — if Sophy were as determined as he appeared to be — why then, — In short Annette had really no valid objections to urge beyond those he had himself raised and combated so valiantly. So that Mr. Cantrill found himself presently quite at his ease, grateful for her sympathy, and given to understand that he would be a welcome visitor even if he could not yet be an acknowledged suitor.

He departed in a very soothed and happy frame of mind.

But Sophy happened to meet him at the Rectory Gate, and having skilfully extracted the gist of her mother's conversation with him, she came home filled with indignant wrath.

"Annie may be engaged, and why not I? She was only nineteen last week, and I shall be eighteen this week. Why must we wait until Papa comes back?"

"My dear Sophy, Annie is waiting until Papa comes back."

"It is all very well to say that, Mamma, but you know it is no such thing. Isn't she staying with his mother? Hasn't he given her a ring? Doesn't everybody know it's settled? Would Annie give him up for anything Papa or anyone said? But if Mr. Cantrill isn't even to be allowed to ask me properly until you give him leave, what can I say when Papa comes home and upsets everything, as you know he

will sooner or later, and tells Mr. Cantrill to his face that if there is one thing he hates more than a doctor it is a parson? How can I stand up to Papa, or be true to *him*, or anything else if I am not even to be given the chance of accepting him?" cried Sophy, with scarlet cheeks and flaming eyes.

"Sophy, dear child, I don't like you to behave like this. I have never seen you in a passion before," said Mrs. Kemys, really surprised. "I don't think it is very nice or womanly — for a little girl of your age."

"I am not a little girl," said Sophy, stamping. "Did you call Annie a little girl at my age? Just because I am a year younger than Annie and not so pretty, you and Granny have always treated me as a little girl who didn't count. It's not that I'm jealous of Annie. I'm not, you know I'm not. But I don't see why I shouldn't be given my chance too," said Sophy, crying. "Do you want me to be an old maid like Cynthia and Perina?" she sobbed.

Presently, however, she allowed herself to be taken into her mother's arms, and soothed and kissed and forgiven. Sophy had none of Annie's caressing ways, but she was ashamed of her outbreak, and found comfort in whispering amidst her final sobs that she really did love Mr. Cantrill in spite of his being so much older.

"Or perhaps because —" she said ingenuously, "for I never could take much interest in young men like Jack Meredydd, who have nothing to say to one,

and don't care a bit what one's thinking about or how one looks. I have always thought it would be pleasant to marry an older man; though at first I thought I *couldn't* love a man with a beard, and especially when I found out that his name was Ambrose. But if you knew how much I think of him now! And he's quite well off, if *that's* what you're thinking about, Mamma, though his sister the Bishop's wife would be sure to see he got on anyhow, I suppose," said Sophy with perfect calm, "even if he's too unworldly to think of it himself. And I don't ask much, Mamma; only that you should let us be engaged conditionally as Annie is. I'm sure when you think how Papa goes on about expense you might be thankful we have both found husbands so quickly," she ended, wiping her eyes.

Sophy's common sense was not to be gainsaid, and Mrs. Kemys found that Sophy's grandmother was disposed to take much the same view as her grandchild.

"It would not be the match we should have desired for Annie, but for Sophy it will do very well," said the old lady, thus unconsciously justifying Sophy's accusations, as Annette, conscience-struck, perceived and acknowledged to herself.

"He is a charming man; most gentle and pleasant in manner. What signifies a few years' difference in age? He is all poetry and she all prose. He will wake from his dream of love to find he has a most excellent housewife at his elbow and she to discover

he is a helpless creature whom she can rule with a rod of iron. That will just suit Miss Sophy. They will do famously, and the Bishop's wife will look after them both —"

"Oh dear Granny. It is strange that you should say so much that Sophy says herself. In some ways she reminds me of you."

"In a great many ways she reminds me of myself, and that is why I cannot get on with her. One does not like to see one's self caricatured. People judging by appearances might say the caricature was the other way about, but it is not. I see in her the crude germ of myself. I daresay I was just such another at Sophy's age, and it is very unpleasant to be reminded of it. Well, well — I wish both she and Annie could be married and settled before Richard returns to raise a thousand difficulties."

"I should think we might get his answer to my letter about Annie any day now. I asked him to cable as definitely as possible, — not to consider expense over such a vital question."

"The more one thinks it over the more one feels that even Richard will find it hard to object to such a marriage as that."

"I don't suppose he could — if it were not for his annoyance about that unlucky accident."

"Unlucky!" said Mrs. Kemys, raising her eyebrows.

"Well, that most fortunate accident," said Annette smiling. "However Annie declares Lord

Yorath wrote him a letter that could not fail to evoke a favourable reply. And her own little note to her father would have melted a heart of stone."

"It will not melt Richard's heart," said the old lady, grimly. "Mine will have more effect. I dwelt on the envy the marriage would arouse in the bosoms of all the parents in the county who have spent their time and money in vain, trying to secure such a match for their daughters!"

"Dear Granny, I cannot believe you wrote that!"

"I may not have put it quite so crudely, but I wrote to that effect," said old Mrs. Kemys, but she had the grace to colour slightly. "We are told to speak unto a fool according to his folly."

"Whatever Richard's faults may be, he is no fool," said his wife, in some displeasure.

"I beg your pardon, my love. In these matters he is a fool, though he may be clever enough in others," Her tone changed. "If I abuse my son to you, Annette, it is partly for the sad consolation of seeing that, do what he may — you can stand up for him still."

A week later came the expected cablegram. It puzzled everybody and pleased nobody, for it consisted of only two words —

Await return.

CHAPTER XVIII

COURTENAY'S LONG VACATION

"As soon as Ascot is over," Annie wrote, "Lady Yorath and Austen will return to Artramont, and I am coming home, mother dear, for I have left you alone too long."

She came home on Midsummer eve, and the gloom and silence of the Manor House seemed immediately dispelled. She was a little pale, a little tired, from the fatigues of the London season, but lovelier than ever, and so exquisitely dressed that Sophy was dumb with amaze and envy.

"Oh Annie, it is not only the clothes — but you have such a — such an air, of not even knowing you have them on," she cried almost jealously.

"I have only been away a few weeks but I have learnt a great many things," said Annie gaily. "Oh Sophy, how you will enjoy coming to stay with me! There was the Opera — only you do not care for music as I do; still you would care for the people in their fine dresses and diamonds, and I went to so many dances I lost count."

"What did you enjoy most of all?" Sophy interrupted.

"My early morning ride with *him*," said Annie,

blushing. "Oh Sophy, I hardly ever missed it, no matter how late I had been up the night before, and he liked it best too. I am very glad though, to have had the experience of all the other things. It will make me so much more fit to be — to be Lady Yorath," she said, laughing and blushing more deeply.

"And you will be able to have as many London balls and dinner parties as you choose all your life," said Sophy, discontentedly, "while I —"

Annie put both arms round her little sister, and laid her lovely face against that plump fair cheek.

"What does anything matter if you love him?" she whispered inconsequently; "and besides, *he* hates going out, and so we have privately agreed to live in the country, and to go off and shoot big game whenever he feels inclined. But do you think I shouldn't be just as happy if we were going to the smallest cottage — together?"

"It's not a cottage I'm going to, but a nice-sized house," said Sophy the practical. "The living is worth six hundred a year; which is not much to be sure, but then he has as much again of his own. We shall be quite comfortable. But I do think, Annie, you might persuade Mamma to let it be a recognised thing."

"Why, she says Mr. Cantrill is here morning, noon and night," said Annie, laughing.

"I daresay he is; but he dare not so much as give me a ring. That is the worst of a man being so much older. It makes him so conscientious. If he

were younger he would have given it to me whether they let him or not, and I could have worn it on a ribbon inside my dress till I was allowed to wear it openly."

"Sophy, are you sure you love him?" cried Annie, aghast at this criticism.

"Of course I love him," said Sophy indignantly. "I don't pretend to be so romantic as you are, Annie, but I wouldn't marry anyone I didn't love, far less a clergyman! though to be sure he is still more in love with me. He thinks me perfect, and of course when a person thinks that of one, one is bound to live up to it."

"Yes," Annie said, and her blue eyes grew dreamy and a smile played about her mouth.

"You hardly listen to what I say," cried Sophy jealously. "You're like a person in a dream. And yet I was counting the moments for you to come back, thinking we would take counsel together over everything. For what is the use of our falling in love, and getting proposals, and being engaged, or anything else, if it's all to be put a stop to when Papa comes home? Mamma may say what she likes, but I am certain that his cable meant he hadn't the slightest intention of giving his consent to your marrying Lord Yorath. And Granny thinks the same though she tries to hide it from me. And if he won't let you make one of the best matches in the world just because he had one of his everlasting rows with Lord

Yorath," cried Sophy vehemently, "ask yourself what chance there will be for Ambrose and me. You know how fond Papa is of a parson at the best of times."

"Sophy, it was Papa's cable that made us decide, after all, to leave London after Ascot, and not stay on to the end of the season as Lady Yorath had planned. Mamma — poor Mamma, tried to make the best of it, as she always tries to do — but when I thought of the letter Austen wrote, which I made him show me," said Annie softly, "though I would not show him mine; and of how we both begged him so respectfully, so — so — affectionately — to make the cable as clear as he could that he *would* consent, — and then we got that answer, why, I couldn't help taking it as you do. Not that it would be all right when he came home, but more in his usual way, as — well, as a threat."

"I am sure it is a threat. I said so from the first," cried Sophy.

"It was that which brought me home," said Annie. She drew closer; almost laughing, but rather tremulously, and there were tears in her blue eyes.

"Sophy," she whispered, "can you keep a secret?"

Annette said to herself that she had never realised all the charm of Annie's sympathy until now. Everyone was in a better humour for her presence,

and even Mr. Cantrill roused himself from his absorption in Sophy to tell old Mr. Meredydd that her sister was a bright being.

Mr. Meredydd had been deeply wounded by the news of Annie's engagement, which had been broken to him by his son before his departure for the Argentine.

"Nothing's to be given out yet, but it's all settled. I've had a little note from her, and she's engaged to Lord Yorath," Jack said to his father. "You must forget what I told you, dad. The fact is, I oughtn't to have said a word. I was counting my chickens before they were hatched."

"I cannot but think she must have given you encouragement, Jack," said Mr. Meredydd, with a trembling lip.

"Never a whit," said Jack stoutly.

If he suffered, he hid it manfully; wrote a note of hearty congratulation to Annie, and went off with a bright face.

His father believed he was broken-hearted; and though his letters breathed hope and energy in every line, doubted while he rejoiced over them.

He still feared Annie must have given his son encouragement. But when he saw her again, she was so very lovely that he almost forgave her, and presently became friendly with her betrothed.

Lord Yorath rode or motored over to Nantgwilt daily. Sometimes Annie rode or drove with him alone, but more often picnics and excursions were

arranged. Mr. Cantrill wished to see the ruined castles and abbeys with which the neighbourhood abounded, and Sophy was fond of picnics, and delighted to order provisions and pack baskets.

Mrs. Kemys found herself drawn into these expeditions as chaperon, and old Mr. Meredydd came with his clerical guest, whose infatuation for little Sophy Kemys filled him with amazement.

Mr. Meredydd had not even been aware that Sophy was grown up until his visitor confided to him the interesting fact of his attachment. The double romance made the picnics delightful to the young, and not less so perhaps to their elders.

Sometimes Lady Yorath joined them, and then more elaborate preparations were made. A second motor with servants and hampers was sent to the destined *rendezvous*, and she generally brought her niece or some other guest with her.

She was always bright, always interested; and she looked younger, Mrs. Kemys thought, every day.

"But you are fretting yourself into a shadow," she said. "Annie did not tell me. These young folk are so wrapt up in their own affairs."

"I am always thin. I feel the heat, and I have a good deal to do one way and another, since Richard went away," said Annette, smiling.

Lady Yorath looked at her with grave hazel eyes.

"You take no care of yourself. Now I will not give you good advice, for that is an odious thing. It relieves the mind of the giver at the expense of

the recipient. But some day — when Annie and Austen are married, I shall take you away with me to — to — where shall I take you? The Ionian Isles? Sicily? Venice? It must be according to the time of year. But whenever you are able you must come and let me take care of you, and teach you some of my own philosophy," she said. "Will you come?"

"If ever I have the opportunity I will come."

"That is a promise," said Lady Yorath, seriously.

"It is a promise. But are you a philosopher?"

"Am I not always gay? Or if not gay — contented?"

"You have a great deal to make you contented."

"Tell me what," she said, smiling.

Annette thought of the contrast they must present to the onlookers. She could not see herself, but she could see Lady Yorath.

A statuesque yet graceful figure, in a summer gown of silvery grey, with floating veil of gossamer lending a tender shade to her face; no longer young, nor in any way aping the trappings of youth; nothing could be more quakerish than the grey veiled hat and soft clouds of grey tulle swathing the throat and tied beneath the oval chin; but at the same time nothing could have been more becoming.

If the dark hair that lay on the broad forehead were frosted; if little lines could be traced upon the delicate face; if a few crow's feet showed at the corners of the fine hazel eyes, yet she remained a beau-

tiful woman, spiritual, humorous, experienced, in a word — charming.

Annette said nothing, but her smile was expressive, and Lady Yorath did not affect to misunderstand it.

“But I am nearly fifty,” she said, “and I lost my husband, who was everything in the world to me — twenty years ago. When he died, I thought my life must end. Yet I have been obliged to go on, as you see. That is, what is left of me. It flits about — looking for distraction.”

“Shedding happiness right and left,” murmured Annette; “doing kindnesses —”

Lady Yorath shrugged her shoulders.

“That by the way, perhaps. But the world has been empty, for all that.”

Mrs. Kemys looked troubled. She glanced away from the speaker towards the hawk profile and tall figure of Lord Yorath, who was leaning against a tree, smiling lazily down upon the exertions of the others, who were blowing at a little fire of sticks.

“*You* are not going to tell me,” said Lady Yorath, with a very gentle mockery in her tones, “that a mother lives again in the lives of her children? Though it is such a popular axiom.”

“I should think many a mother must have smiled at it,” said Annette, and she smiled herself. “Every day — every day one lives and watches them grow up, God bless them — one becomes conscious that

these are separate existences of which we know — almost nothing."

"We know a good deal," said Lady Yorath, shaking her head; "but only because we watch so anxiously; and because we knew them so well when they were little. They tell us nothing, or only what they are pleased to think lies within our comprehension."

"They cannot tell us, for they do not understand themselves. Life is so new to them."

"And we are so old; so antiquated and out of date. They criticise us secretly even if they are too kind to criticise us openly. But we remember we were the same once, I suppose, and so we laugh and forgive them," said Lady Yorath. "I adore my boy. I bless God for him every day. But I do not pretend to think *I* — that is me, myself," she interpolated whimsically, "my identity — has ever been merged in his in any way whatsoever. Of course our existences are as separate as our personalities. I am outside his life. It is his wife who will come nearest to sharing that."

"If she ever is his wife," said Mrs. Kemys, sighing.

"Ah, you are thinking of the mysterious cable. We all agreed at the time that it was unsatisfactory, but we are not going to let it depress us. Of course we understand that everyone could not be so forgiving as you were over that accident, which, as it turned out, was such a lucky accident for Austen," said Lady Yorath, prettily. "But all will be as we

wish in the end. Annie has a fine spirit of her own, and Austen is a match for a dozen reluctant fathers, though he is so quiet you would not think it, perhaps."

"He is very silent."

"He is silent whenever he has nothing to say, which is a very rare quality! But when he speaks I assure you it is very much to the point. He is quite as clever as Annie, though in a different way. He has more judgment and she more perception. Hers is just the sort of cleverness wanted to complete his own. So between them they will do very well."

"And he is so accomplished."

"Oh, accomplished! That is a matter of opportunity, not of brains," said Lady Yorath, her eager interest in the discussion lending a thousand varieties of expression to her charming face. "But he is clever with his hands. There is nothing he cannot make. That means a reflective brain — ingenuity. He was always quite sufficiently clever to make me fear he would marry a fool. Have you not noticed how clever men always seem to pick out the silliest and most commonplace women they can find to marry? And form their opinion of the whole sex accordingly. But, thank God, Annie has noble qualities as well as beauty. Her intelligence, her sincerity, her generosity, are stamped on her frank, innocent face. Oh, I am looking forward to some remarkable grandchildren, and you must do the

same! Thus we shall be consoled for losing a son and a daughter."

"Dear Lady Yorath, I never dare to look forward to anything," said poor Mrs. Kemys.

"But then—how much pleasure you lose." Lady Yorath's musical voice took a sudden inflection of compassion. "Are you really afraid? But why? Here are all of us, you and I, and the two most concerned, and even Mr. Turley,—determined that this marriage must take place soon. What can one man, however obstinate, do in the face of such a combination of wills? Even if he meant to be so unreasonable as to oppose it, which the cable does not necessarily imply. Never have two words lent themselves to so much argument," she ended laughing.

To herself she said, shrugging her shoulders, "I should like to encounter this redoubtable Richard, whose wife turns pale at the very thought of his opposition."

The summer days passed, bringing no change, save that little Corney came home for his holidays, very well, and brown and merry; while Courtenay returned for the long vacation, paler and taller than ever, having evidently overworked himself.

Courtenay's sojourn at the Manor House, however, was not to be a long one. He had a conversation with his mother a few days after his arrival, which led to this result.

He was, in his way, a conscientious youth, but nevertheless he was not above the affectation of pretending to be absorbed in his Greek testament as she came across the garden, work-basket in hand, to the bench beside the low wicker chair where he lay, reposing his long limbs in the early morning sunshine.

The sound of the grass-cutter came pleasantly through the still air, and the occasional call of the man guiding his horses up and down the slope of the meadow-land on the outer edge of the feathery sea of ripe grass which stood in the midst of the fallen crop.

Courtenay was doubly self-conscious just now, because he desired to bestow a gentle lecture upon his parent and had not quite made up his mind how to begin. As she innocently supposed him to be absorbed in study she afforded him no opening, and consequently he was presently obliged to plunge suddenly into the topic uppermost in his mind.

"In my father's absence I cannot think it right, mother, that Cantrill should be permitted to make himself quite so much at home as he does. Annie and Yorath are all very well. That is a different matter. Nobody could desire a better marriage for her, and Yorath is a particularly charming man. Besides everyone knows all about him. But after all, who is Cantrill? And what do we know of *him*?"

"I am glad you approve of Lord Yorath," said Mrs. Kemys, half smiling and half vexed. "But I happen to think Mr. Cantrill a very charming

man, too, in his way. And as for what we know about him,— we know he is a great friend of Canon Brettle's and the guest of Mr. Meredydd."

"But I cannot find out that you have made any enquiries about him," said Courtenay, "beyond those two facts which mean nothing. Sophy seems to think that he must be everything desirable simply because his sister married a septuagenarian bishop. In the absence of my father, and — and Rodric, I think you might have consulted me."

"My dear boy, your father will make any enquiries he chooses when he returns."

"I do not for a moment believe that my father will sanction the engagement."

"That may be, Courtenay, but until he comes I have to act as I think proper. And there is Sophy's happiness to be considered. I think you should consider it particularly, for she has always been a very devoted little sister to you."

"I am considering it, but my desire for her welfare does not blind me to the fact that she is a mere child, who cannot know her own mind," said Courtenay loftily.

"She is eighteen now. I was Roddy's mother before I was nineteen," said Mrs. Kemys, remembering Mr. Cantrill's arguments.

Courtenay was disconcerted, but not silenced.

"He is much too old for her, and I am surprised she should fancy him at all, for personally I consider him a prig. He corrected a quotation I made

yesterday at luncheon in the most uncalled for way, considering I was his host."

Courtenay had occupied his father's place with great content and dignity since his return.

"Dear boy, let us go on happily together while we can," said Mrs. Kemys pleadingly. "Troubles and partings come soon enough. Your sisters have had little pleasure in their young lives. Do not grudge them their enjoyment of these bright summer days. You will like Mr. Cantrill better when you know him better, and I think you will enjoy the picnics too."

"Picnics are not in my line," said Courtenay, discontentedly, "and Sophy is so taken up —"

"Is that it?" she smiled at him kindly. "My poor boy. But I want you to enjoy your holidays. What would you like to do, if you do not care for picnics? I want you to be happy too."

"That is beside the point. I do not look for happiness. Besides, I question very much if human life was ever intended to be happy," said Courtenay, gloomily. "I was not thinking of my personal wishes."

"But I want you to think of your personal wishes."

"How can I?" he muttered. "When you've had so many expenses, what with Manuel, and Roddy — and one thing and another —"

"Then there is something you have set your heart on. Dear Courtenay, tell me what it is. Never

mind expense. I might be able to manage it."

"I am not asking it, mother," he said, almost angrily, "do you suppose I can't see that you'll have trouble enough when my father comes home? When I think of all you've been doing. Even if it is as you say — that Mr. Turley found you had a claim to — to money, I've no right to ask you to throw it away upon me."

She would have risen and kissed him if she dared, but she was a well-trained mother of sons, so she refrained from any such demonstration, and contented herself with leaning forward to bestow a soft caress on the sleeve of his blue serge jacket.

His consideration touched her. Perhaps, as his brothers and sisters declared, Courtenay was a prig, but he was a good boy in the main, and if not usually given to much thought for others, at least he thought of his mother.

"My darling boy. It would not be throwing it away. I would do as much for you as for Roddy. And you deserve a holiday if anyone does. You have cost us hardly anything. When I think of your scholarships — and your hard work —"

"That's all right," said Courtenay, in great alarm. He could accept Sophy's gross flattery of his mediocre lyrical efforts, with equanimity, and even eagerness; but when a chance word of praise was bestowed upon his real achievements he grew restive and uncomfortable.

"You can't compare my case with Roddy's. He was being started in life. My case is quite different."

"I don't know what your case is, dear."

She drew from him at length the admission of his yearning to join a select company of his own especial cronies, who had planned a reading party in Switzerland; intending to combine work with sight-seeing.

"But, Courtenay, there is no reason on earth why you shouldn't go."

He mentioned the probable cost of his own share of the expedition.

"My dearest boy! It would not amount to much more than the price of a couple of new dresses for Annie."

"Then it's a great shame that girls' clothes should be allowed to cost so much," said Courtenay, thunderstruck.

"So much that you see your going or staying will make practically no difference," she said, smiling nervously.

"It will make all the difference to me," exclaimed Courtenay. "All the difference to my chances of distinguishing myself — apart from the enjoyment, — and apart from the good to my health, for, after all, one has to consider keeping fit if one wants to be good for anything."

His light blue eyes lit up with excitement. He

could not sit still, but picked up his book from the lawn, and began to walk up and down in great agitation.

"If you are quite, quite sure, mother, that it won't add to your difficulties,—of course it would be heaven on earth to me. When you think I have never been outside England! But I thought it might be — just the last straw —"

She shook her head.

"The only difference it will make to me is that I shall be sorry not to have you with me, dear boy."

"I shall be here another day or two," he said consolingly. "And I say — I can go and look up Manuel — and tell you how the little chap is getting on."

"That will be another great advantage," she said gratefully, "though I have splendid reports."

"I must make my arrangements at once," said Courtenay.

His listless manner had vanished. He put the Greek testament into his pocket, and his expression was alert and joyful.

"Do, my darling. I hope you will have a happy summer."

"I think I can promise you it will be a profitable one," he said, looking almost radiant.

He fidgeted around her bench for a moment, and then said suddenly and shyly:

"You know, mother, I shall return it all to you one day — a thousand-fold," — and actually

stooped and gave her a hurried kiss, in full view of the Manor House windows.

Three days later Courtenay departed, vainly trying to conceal the elation that possessed him.

Just before mounting the dog-cart that was to convey him and his modest baggage to the station, he stepped aside from the group assembled on the steps of the Manor House to witness his departure, and said a few words in his mother's ear.

"By the bye, mother, you need not worry any more over what I said to you about Cantrill."

"What you said about Mr. Cantrill?"

"He is *all right*, after all," whispered Courtenay, excitedly. "There is no need for you to make the enquiries I advised. I have just found out,—though, if you will believe it, Sophy herself did not know it—that he is a Fellow of Trinity, and *got the Ireland.*"

CHAPTER XIX

CORNEY WITH A LETTER

THE party was now yet further diminished in numbers by the departure of Sophy — whose loud complaints that Annie had been permitted to stay for weeks and weeks with the Yoraths in spite of the fact that her father had not yet given his consent to the engagement, whereas she only asked to be allowed to stay from Monday to Saturday with the bishop's wife — at last took effect.

Her mother consented. Sharman, who had returned from Switzerland, was to go with her as maid, and old Mr. Meredydd, who was also bidden to the palace, promised to escort her.

It was decreed, in accordance with his sister's views of propriety, that Mr. Cantrill should meet his loved one under the episcopal roof and not accompany her upon the journey.

Their departure was something of a relief, for Sophy's grievances had of late been especially pressing; and Mrs. Kemys enjoyed a quiet summer evening, wandering round the garden with Annie, who carried the wooden basket while her mother clipped off the dead roses.

"I have never known the roses bloom so continu-

ously. But then I have never known such a summer," she said.

"Papa is a wonderful gardener," said Annie. "There are no such roses at Artramont. It is not so pretty as this place, mother, though it is so much bigger and finer."

"It is not an old house — but you will love it better than this in time, my darling. You are going over to spend the day there to-morrow?"

"Austen is coming over to fetch me in the motor," said Annie. "I hope it will be fine."

"The sky looks rather threatening," said Mrs. Kemys. "We could do with a thunderstorm. It would refresh everything after the heat. But I hope if it comes that it will not break up the summer."

"Mother, do you know that this has been the happiest summer of my whole life?"

"I am glad, my darling," said Mrs. Kemys, but she felt a little pang, nevertheless.

"Oh, Mamma, you are thinking it is because of Austen, and of course it must be; how could I help it? His love has glorified everything. But it has been home too. For I have been even happier here than I was in London. It's all been ideal; you so sweet and dear, and the beautiful summer days with no ugly words or rows to disfigure them, as there used to be. The long happy days with Austen, and the long peaceful evenings with you. I have an instinct that tells me such a time can never come to

me again in all my life, however happy I may be. It's been too like Paradise."

They were walking down the ilex avenue now, and she stopped suddenly, and put her arms about her mother, and cried a little.

"Annie, dearest, what is it? You are over tired?"

"No, no. Oh, Mamma! You always think of one's bodily health," cried Annie, half laughing and half impatient. "Don't you know that one may be so happy that one can't bear it? That it makes one suddenly see too clearly the unhappy side of life? The partings — the endings of old things that must come with the beginnings of new ones. Wasn't there ever a time in your life when you felt like that? — thinking that your joy must bring sorrow to someone —"

"I don't think I was ever so tender-hearted as you are, my darling," said Mrs. Kemys, simply. "I was wrapt up in my own bliss. I look back and wonder at my selfishness —"

"Were *you* ever selfish? And had you ever a summer in your life like this? Do you mean when you and Papa —" Annie's wonder made her tone incredulous.

"Oh, Annie, yes, yes," cried her mother, but she could not put her memories into words, though her tremulous smile, and the tears in her eyes as she looked at her child were eloquent.

She thought of that long past summer, and the

far-off days when she, too, trod upon air, and dwelt in dreams; and of a girl as fair as Annie, with a young lover more imperious, more eager, but not less devoted than Annie's lover, who was so tender and so considerate of her child.

"Is there anything more depressing than a wet day in summer?" asked old Mrs. Kemys, dismally. There had been a violent thunderstorm during the night, and the rain had descended steadily throughout the day. She looked out upon muddy walks, soaked grass, dripping trees, and sodden roses drooping their melancholy heads, with half their petals dashed to earth. "Look at my geraniums all splashed and spoilt. I can see them absolutely shivering in this unaccustomed chill and storm and wind. And let me tell you, my dear, that the expression of your face reflects the dreariness of the weather."

"I suppose the suspense is beginning to tell on me," said Annette. "I cannot understand getting no news from Richard. There has been time to hear by letter since his cable came. I don't even know where he is, nor when he expects to return. One would think he would have something to say about Annie's engagement, even if he does not approve."

"It would be more like him to say nothing, but catch the first steamer home, and walk suddenly in upon us, and take all by surprise," said Mrs. Kemys.

"He would not take me by surprise," said An-

nette, "for that is exactly what I am expecting him to do, every hour of the day and night."

"Then he will not do it, my dear, since it is always the unexpected which happens."

"I think he will do it, dear Granny."

There was a pause, and then old Mrs. Kemys said, with an attempt at lightness —

"After all, he cannot kill you."

"Do you think if he did — that I should care very much?" said Annette, gazing out upon the rain with her chin in her hand. "Anything would be better than the suspense I have endured lately."

"My dear, you have done wonders. Whatever Richard may say to you he cannot undo the good you have done for the children. There is little Manuel, growing stronger every day, through the mercy of God and the energy of his mother; poor Courtenay enjoying a respite, it is to be hoped, from the burning of the midnight oil, and I trust stretching his long legs and straightening his cramped back, climbing the Swiss mountains; Roddy, dear boy, happy and content in his new life; Sophy provided for — though to be sure that is more by good luck than good management — and Annie — Well," said Mrs. Kemys chuckling, "Richard will hardly be able to blame you for Annie's good fortune, since it was his own bad driving that made her acquainted with Lord Yorath."

"Granny, I am frightened by my very success. After the long grey time, with nothing going right,

the poor children discontented; their father grumbling, in constant displeasure; I, never seeming able to mend matters though I worked night and day; and now suddenly — suddenly — every tangle seems to have smoothed itself out as though by magic. I did evil — whatever anyone may say I *felt* it to be evil — that good might come. And good has come with a completeness that makes me actually afraid —”

“Why not put it differently? It would be just as fair to say that Providence helps those who help themselves,” said Mrs. Kemys impatiently. “Of what are you afraid?”

“I am afraid that when Richard comes back the cup of happiness will be dashed from Annie’s lips at least — if not from mine. Things cannot go on in this happy-go-lucky yet prosperous manner. It is not possible. Misfortune *must* come.”

“It will not be your fault if it does. You have done the best you can.”

“Have I?” said Annette. “Dear Granny, I wonder. I wonder if, when Richard comes home, and you know exactly what I have done — whether you will blame me?”

“I am quite sure I shall not,” said Mrs. Kemys, stubbornly. “Richard has treated you and his children with great injustice for a number of years. If you have therefore, by any chance, been able to get the better of him during his absence, why in his own best interests and those of his children you

would have been a great fool not to do so. That is my common-sense view of the matter. He may blame you for taking advantage of him — and no doubt he will. But after all he wouldn't have been the least grateful to you if you hadn't. He would have taken it as a matter of course, just as he has always taken your devotion to him."

"It *would* have been a matter of course — if —"

"Exactly. *If*."

Then they were both silent, looking out upon the rain; perhaps equally troubled in mind, though the older lady had striven so decidedly to cheer the younger.

At six o'clock the rain ceased, Annette took leave of her mother-in-law, and returned home, picking her way across the wet grass to the door in the wall which opened upon the kitchen-garden of the Manor House.

A gleam of sunshine broke out, lighting the rain drops hanging upon the gooseberry and currant bushes, making the wet paths glisten, and gilding the lower branches of the cedar, which rose darkly, against a purple bank of heavy clouds. It lighted also the uncovered flaxen head of little Corney, who stood in the garden porch, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking out.

"Were you watching for me, my son?"

The little boy nodded.

"Are you coming upstairs to your own room?" he asked, anxiously.

"I will come, if you wish it. Have you something to say to me?"

He nodded again.

His expression was important and his ruddy face grave and intent. He walked upstairs before her, tramping solemnly in his heavy boots, leading the way to her room.

"Have you been getting into mischief, my son?" she said.

Corney shut the door and stood before it, like a sentinel.

"No," he said. "It's a commission. I was to give you something from Annie."

He took a letter from his pocket.

"I was to give it to you at six o'clock, or as soon after as I could. But you were to be alone when I gave it to you. It is past six now."

Mrs. Kemys took the letter and read it, standing in the middle of the room.

"Darling mother,—darling, darling. When you get this, Austen and I will be married. It's for your sake, or do, do believe we would never have done it. It has been so hard not to tell you. I longed to tell you, yesterday evening, when we were walking in the garden, you cutting off the dead roses and I carrying the basket just I used when I was little. I longed to cry out to you that this was the last even-

ing, and that I should never be Annie Kemys any more.

“When Papa comes home now he can’t blame you, poor Mamma. You knew nothing, you dreamt nothing. It was just Annie’s wickedness,—our wickedness, Austen’s and mine.

“When the cablegram came, Austen was angry. He is very stern and quiet when he is angry, not like Papa. He said that was not the answer we had asked for, nor the answer that ought to have been sent. In fact it was no answer at all. And I agreed with him, and knowing Papa, I felt quite, quite sure that it only meant he was coming home to have a dreadful row, and insult Austen, and bully you, and make you so unhappy that perhaps from pity I might be forced to give *him* up — or wait at least until I was twenty-one.

“So Austen said we had better be married at once, and his mother said so too, but I said I couldn’t be married except from my own home, and that I must go back to you first. And she thought and said I was quite right and that it ought not to be while I was staying with them. And Austen said wherever it was the responsibility was his only, and his mother must have nothing to do with it. She was a little displeased, I am afraid, but she promised not to interfere, and it was agreed that instead of staying until the end of the season I was to come home. The rest is all between Austen and me. He brought me down from London as you know, and

on the way we settled it all, and oh mother, if I was a little disappointed to think I should never have the beautiful wedding I had dreamt of, yet when I saw your dear face so thin and white, and found out what you tried to hide, how you dreaded Papa's return, and everything falling through, and the old unhappy days coming back, and your Annie losing the wonderful, wonderful happiness she had found — then I *could* not regret anything.

"I let Austen plan it all his own way. It would have been much sooner only his lawyers were so dreadfully slow because he said there must be proper settlements and things, all the more because he had the sole responsibility. The poor Angel had to have a habitation or whatever they call it at Chidlow to enable us to be married there. He chose it because it was so far off and no one would know him, and we are to be married at two o'clock this afternoon.

"Oh mother darling, I never thought I should cry on my wedding day, but I am crying now because it seems such a sad strange little way to get married. I'm writing this in my room, and Austen will be here presently to take me — as you think — to Artramont, but really to Chidlow, and then to London where we pick up the luggage that is waiting for me in Eaton Place. Oh, it is raining so hard, I shall not be the bride the sun shines on.

"I am going to trust this letter to little Corney, who is the wisest and safest messenger in the world and who will do *exactly* what he promises to do.

"I will telegraph our address to-morrow, and then, mother darling, you'll write to me and forgive me, and say you understand. Oh, if I could dare to think you would be glad, but I daren't quite hope for that, I am afraid you will feel obliged to be a little vexed. But think how much trouble and quarrelling and argument and crying have been avoided, and remember I am going to marry *him* whom I love so dearly that I should die if I were parted from him, and forgive your own,

"Annie."

"Mother, mother," said little Corney, "Annie said I was to stand by and watch while you read her letter, and that if reading it made you unhappy, I was to comfort you. Has it made you unhappy, mother?" said the little boy, anxiously.

Mrs. Kemys hid her face in her hands.

CHAPTER XX

THE DAY OF RECKONING

THE first newspaper placard which caught the eye of Richard Kemys upon his arrival in London from New Zealand — acquainted him with the news of his daughter's marriage.

His attention was attracted by the sight of his own name in large letters. Then he read:

Romantic wedding of sporting Peer with Welsh Heiress. Lord Yorath, the well known Big Game Hunter, elopes with Miss Kemys of Nantgwilt.

He stood still for a moment before the announcement, and then lifted his hand to beckon the boy with the paper . . . The dreaded pang shot through his left breast and almost paralysed arm and hand. He stood motionless, suffocating — unable to move . . .

"I say," said young Bewan, gently, "that was a bad turn."

With a kind of rough solicitude he assisted him presently into a cab, and they drove off together.

Their destination was the Great Western Hotel.

The clip-clop of the horse fell heavily and slowly on their ears, as they sat, side by side, in silence. The heat of the London streets on this summer day,

was almost tropical. The dust of wood paving, the breath of asphalt and the glare of stone equally trying.

Richard Kemys turned his blue eyes upon his companion with something of the past agony still lurking in their depths.

"I was only startled, not angry," he said, almost pleadingly. "It's hard luck on a man to be met with a — a sudden shock to make him worse again the very day he sets foot in his native country. Where's the newspaper? Did you get it?"

"I got it. You can't read it now. For the Lord's sake, wait till you're settled comfortably in your own room before you begin thinking of anything that agitates or vexes you."

"I don't know that it vexes me," said Richard Kemys, rather sullenly.

He said nothing more on the subject, however, until their arrival at Paddington.

Robert Bewan saw him safely installed in an armchair beside the open window of his bedroom, and then handed him over the paper, with a warning look and word.

The paragraph it contained told Richard no more than the announcement upon the placard; beyond the additional statement that the marriage had taken place at Chidlow.

He lay back with closed eyes considering the matter, almost surprised by the philosophic calm with which he was inclined to regard it.

The time of his anger had been when the news of his daughter's attachment first reached him, upon his arrival at Auckland.

The voyage had been uneventful. His health had certainly benefitted, though he observed with annoyance that the combination of good living and inactivity was causing him to grow perceptibly and rapidly stouter.

There had been no return of the pain he dreaded, and, in the absence of its return his fears had been almost lulled to rest.

He did not forget that he had followed the doctor's advice and undertaken the sea voyage, but he regretted the impulse which had led him to engage the young medico to accompany him.

Robert Bewan had proved a most good-natured and unobtrusive, if rough-mannered companion, and he was as popular in the main with his fellow-passengers as Richard Kemys was the reverse.

But he had been of no use to his employer because his employer had been to all appearances perfectly well; and though Richard could not be sorry for this, he was very sorry that he had wasted a first class return fare upon an attendant whose services had proved unnecessary.

He did not make himself agreeable to young Bewan, but his rudeness was met by an imperturbable good temper. It was evident that the medical student regarded him merely as a cross patient, and humoured him accordingly. There was little satis-

faction to be got out of snubbing him, but Richard Kemys got what satisfaction he could.

The immunity from further manifestation of the dreaded symptoms, which he had enjoyed during the voyage, had restored his confidence, and he landed in good spirits, and almost forgot the necessity for mounting guard over his emotions which had been urged upon him,—so that when he read his wife's letters informing him of Lord Yorath's proposal to Annie, and betraying the fact that the acquaintance so inauspiciously begun had been continued during his absence — he gave way to his anger without attempting to exercise the slightest control over himself. The manliness of Lord Yorath's letter did not soothe his outraged dignity, nor did the pleading of his daughter assuage his wrath, any more than his wife's anxious representations of the obvious advantages of the match. He sent off the cablegram they demanded in a fury indescribable, meaning it indeed, as Annie had divined, to be a threat.

His rage was cut short by an attack so severe that it threatened to suffocate him. It was followed in a few hours by another, and a day or two later by a third. His alarms returned tenfold.

Young Bewan now repaid his patron's incivility by unremitting kindness and attention; and Richard, subdued, and even terrified, by the agony he had endured, accepted his ministrations, allowed him to call in the best medical advice, and for a time submitted to every remedy suggested.

The New Zealand doctor was franker than the London specialist had been, or took a more serious view of the case. He advised Richard to postpone his journey home, and send for his wife. But his patient declared he was better at sea, and insisted upon undertaking the return voyage immediately. If he had to rest, he would rest at home. He resolved, however, to cultivate henceforth the philosophy urged upon him by Robert Bewan, to whom he had in his first outburst of indignation, confided the fact of his daughter's engagement.

Robert Bewan was naturally only amused and interested by this sequel to the motor accident he had witnessed, and his wonder, not unmingled with contempt, at the notion that any man could allow a mere wound to his own *amour propre* to stand in the way of his child's happiness, and a marriage so advantageous in every respect,—was expressed with the bluntness that characterized him. His outspokenness was not without its effect.

Richard began to wonder at himself, and even, perhaps, to grow a little ashamed in secret of his outburst. He thought too of the fate that was threatening him, and beside it the importance of all other happenings appeared to dwindle. Fool that he was to allow himself to be irritated at the risk of his health — nay of his life.

After all, though he had disliked Lord Yorath at first sight,—and his brow grew dark at the recollection of the handsome face that had confronted his

own so calmly and disdainfully — yet it could not be denied that such a marriage would be a fine thing for Annie.

He had not answered his wife's letters only because he knew that his silence would be more terrible to her than any expression of wrath; but as the days went on he became glad that he had not committed himself in writing, nor by his ambiguous cable.

He was very ill on the voyage home, how ill he perhaps hardly realised. But when he rallied, and spent long hours reclining in his deck chair, he amused himself by picturing his return to Nantgwilt. He fancied himself obliging his haughty would-be son-in-law to eat humble-pie, before he finally relented and permitted his daughter to marry the most eligible bachelor in the county.

He did not think with any special tenderness of Annie, though of all his children she and little Corney had come nearest to the finding of the soft spot in his heart, if any such soft spot could be said to exist. But he began to dwell with pleasure upon the thought of her reigning at Artramont; and he tried to remember all he had ever heard of the fortune Lord Yorath's grandfather had made.

Since therefore, the idea of the marriage had grown familiar to him, it was not anger, as he said, so much as amaze which possessed him on beholding the announcement of the newspaper placard.

He was struck dumb with astonishment that he should thus be set at naught, and that the marriage

he had but just made up his mind to sanction, should have become an accomplished fact without either his authority or knowledge.

"I suppose it was the — the surprise which upset me," he said to young Bewan.

"Whatever it was, it's a good thing the marriage is over for your sake," said the young man, sensibly. "You'd better look at it like that. A wedding always means a lot of fuss, and bother, and emotion. And very likely quarrelling in your case," he added to himself, but this reflection he kept from the ears of Mr. Kemys.

"It's all very well — but I know I'm talking like a fool when I say it's this or that which upset me. On board ship — there was no reason, and yet I felt myself getting worse every day," said the older man, gloomily. "I don't believe I'm in a fit state to go home at all."

"I don't think you're in a fit state to be away from home just now," said young Bewan, soothingly. "That's the right way to put it. Look here, come with me to-morrow and see the man you saw before leaving England."

"You told me he wasn't the right man."

"I'd rather you saw Sir Jeremy, of course. But you jibed at that last time I suggested it."

"Why should I see any more people?" said Richard Kemys angrily. "Hasn't the ship's surgeon been looking after me all this time? You did nothing but sing his praises. For my part the New

Zealand fellow was the only doctor I believed in. He told me straight out there was nothing to be done but keep my courage up and hope for the best. How much plainer would you have a man speak? What's the use of dragging me round to any more doctors? You know very well they can't do me any good."

The medical student was silent.

"We'll stop here of course to-night," said Richard, "and I'll rest through the heat of the day to-morrow, if it's another day like this; and go home then in the cool of the evening."

"Do they expect you? Have you written?"

"How could I write?" growled Richard.

"Would you like to send a telegram?"

"No, I shouldn't. Look here, you shall come down with me, and see my wife, and prepare her for — for this. Tell her I know all about this infernal wedding and that I don't care a straw about that or — or anything else — now. Tell her she's got to keep every mortal bother and worry away from me. I want to sit in the garden and not see a soul till — till I'm either better or worse. Or if I've got to see a doctor, I'll have Harries. I've known him all my life, and he's just as good as anyone else."

"Suppose Mrs. Kemys should be away from home?"

"She's never away from home."

"You ought to be met at the station."

"I'll walk. For God's sake don't keep making idiotic suggestions. Will you come or will you not?"

"Oh, I'll come," said the young man, shrugging his shoulders. To himself he said, "I'll come for the wife's sake."

Thus it was arranged between them that they should travel down to Nantgwilt together on the morrow.

Annette had spent the evening out of doors with little Corney; listening to his stories of his school experiences, and his boasting of what "our fellows" had done in recent school matches.

He was very happy to have his mother all to himself, and chattered away until a late hour, when she bethought herself, and sent him to bed.

She remained in the pleasant summer darkness alone, listening absently to the twitter of the birds in the ilex grove; with her mind full of Annie, and of the letter of loving reproach and forgiveness and blessing that she had that day sent her.

The square embattled tower of the church, outlined against a pale luminous sky, rose above the steep roof of the old house. Only one or two of the windows in all that dark mass of building showed a twinkling light.

A Dresden lamp, with a yellow shade, stood in the oak drawing-room, and its cheerful glow was cast in a brilliant square upon the lawn.

The porch was dark, but her eyes, accustomed to the darkness, perceived an indistinct movement in the doorway. She fancied someone had come out of the house and was standing there. She rose, supposing that old Pryse, who liked early hours, was fidgetting about, waiting for her to come in, that he might shut up the house.

But as she moved slowly across the lawn she saw two figures cross the space between the lamp and the uncurtained window of the drawing-room; and one of the figures — massive, square-shouldered, unmistakable — she recognised instantly.

The shock was so great that her heart almost ceased beating.

The moment had come. Everything must now be known. Her own treachery — was it treachery? She told herself that it was, as she stood out there among the deep shadows, shivering in the breathless heat of the summer night, and watching that unconscious mighty figure of her husband in the light.

Everything must come out. The absence of Roddy was already known, but that of Courtenay, and little Manuel had to be accounted for. Sophy's visit to the bishop's wife, which had seemed so reasonable when Sophy and Mr. Cantrill had argued in its favour, now suddenly became a monstrous thing because she saw it with Richard's eyes. Annie's marriage — ah, if he had come two days earlier! Thank God he had not come two days earlier.

The absence of the children — the innovations — the repairs — the cottages — how reckless she had been; but to what excellent purpose! She clasped her thin hands across her bosom as though to still the tempestuous beating of her heart.

She said to herself in the calm of despair that she had sown the wind and must reap the whirlwind.

Then suddenly came a violent reaction.

She realised that the time of waiting — of sickening suspense was over at last; and she was conscious of a great throb of relief even in the midst of terror. No reproaches, no punishment could be harder to bear than that burden of secret remorse.

Richard was, after all, not only the harsh, irritable, ill-tempered paterfamilias whom her children knew; he was also the man who had been her lover in happier days; her mate who had come back to her after the longest separation they had known since they were wed. She would go to him boldly, and throw herself into his arms, and cry to him, "*Richard, I love you, and I have wronged you.*" She would pour forth her confession upon his breast.

Perhaps taken by surprise, in the first emotion or gladness of his home-coming, remembering the many, many times that she had accorded forgiveness to him unasked — he would listen to her, and be generous.

But if this were too great a happiness, even then — oh, paradise on earth — only to be rid of the burden of secrecy, of disloyalty, of deception — and to regain her lost peace of mind.

Richard's figure passed and repassed the lamp. Had he left the drawing-room? If so, she would meet him in the hall — perhaps he had gone upstairs to seek her in their room . . . She hesitated, took her courage in both hands, and went indoors.

The drawing-room door was open, and by the table which held the yellow lamp stood a young man whom she had never seen before. An ordinary looking young man, with a bull-dog face and shrewd eyes.

He came forward, as she paused, startled, upon the threshold. His manners were respectful, but perfectly unembarrassed.

"Please don't be frightened," he said, "your husband has returned home unexpectedly, and brought me with him. My name's Bewan. I accompanied him on his voyage to New Zealand, as no doubt you know."

"I did not know," Annette hardly knew what to say. "Where is my husband?" she said, faltering. "I don't understand."

She stood irresolute, inclined to turn at once and go in search of Richard; but the young man held up his hand, half entreatingly, half authoritatively.

"Please wait — I know you must think it strange. But please listen for a moment. He's — he's not been well."

She was no longer inclined to move. She stood

looking at him, with her pale face and startled eyes.

"I saw him — pass the window?"

"Oh yes — he's all right so far as appearance goes. But he wants me to — to explain things before he sees you. That's why he went upstairs as soon as he heard you were in the garden, and left me here to introduce myself. I'd have arranged it better if I'd known how. But he's not an easy person to manage, as I daresay you know. To begin with, he wasn't fit to travel at all to-day, far less walk up from the station. I'd no idea there was such a hill. But he gets into such a violent state if he's contradicted that I was just obliged to let him do as he liked."

"Please explain as quickly as you can, and let me go to him," said Annette. Her gentle dignity concealed both her alarm and her offence at this manner of Richard's home-coming; remorse was momentarily dispelled by indignation.

"It's not so easy to explain — since he's chosen, so far as I can gather, to make such a mystery over the whole bag of tricks," said Bewan, in rather vexed tones. "I met him first the day he was upset out of a dog-cart,— I happened to be passing —"

"You were the man on the bicycle?" she interrupted quickly.

"I was the man on the bicycle — if you like to put it that way. I am a medical student, and I did what I could for your daughter —"

"Yes, yes. They told me —" she tried to hurry out a word of thanks in the midst of her perceptible agony of impatience.

"That's nothing. Lord Yorath carried her off to the hospital, and I remained with your husband, and attended to *him*."

An exclamation escaped the lips of Annette.

"Was he hurt then, after all?"

"Not to say hurt. He was shaken. It wasn't that. And yet that may have had a good deal to do with it too. It may have set something going — that was ripe for mischief. Anyway he had an attack of the heart."

"Richard!"

"I told him what I thought it was, and advised him to see a specialist, and there the matter ended so far as I was concerned. But a day or two later I ran up against him at the Great Western Hotel."

"Yes."

"He'd consulted a doctor, who'd confirmed my opinion more or less — but the fact is, there are heart cases which can't be diagnosed with any certainty until after — in fact, which can't be diagnosed —" said the young man confusedly. "For instance, angina pectoris, you know, is often unassociated with evident physical signs."

Annette did not know. She could not speak, but made a gesture which implored him to proceed quickly.

"I expect the doctor found his nerves in rather a

rotten state, and that's why he suggested a sea-voyage, and advised him not to go alone. So he asked me to go with him, and I went. Going out there he seemed to get much better —" The medical student hesitated. Why should he pain her by going into details? But after all, he told her, for she asked the question.

"Did my letters upset him?"

"The news he got from home put him into one of his rages," he said frankly. "But you know how easily he's annoyed by the merest trifle. If it wasn't one thing it was bound to be another. He'd been warned to control his temper, but his temper's been his master too long, I expect. He made himself ill, and then got frightened and let me persuade him to see a doctor. The doctor wanted him to stay out there, and send for you, but he wouldn't. He insisted on coming home. On the way back,—it's no use mincing matters—he got much worse. He's had several attacks lately, and he had one yesterday. By bad luck he saw the announcement of your daughter's elopement, almost directly after he landed. The surprise bowled him over a bit. Of course I don't know if it's true?"

"It's true," she said faintly.

"I was to tell you he didn't mind," said the young man, hastily.

"He didn't mind!" she gasped.

Robert Bewan drew closer, and spoke in a lower tone.

"You see he's not in much of a state just now to mind anything," he said, confidentially. "He's in a mortal funk of this beastly pain coming on again, and the only thing he can take any interest in, for the time being, is the hope of staving it off. You and I would be just the same, you know, if we were in his shoes. When it's a question of acute pain — agony — it's no use pretending people can think of anything else on the face of the earth, because they can't. When one's seen the real thing, one *knows*. All we can do for him is to try and keep him absolutely quiet. He oughtn't to hear or see anything which can irritate or upset him. He asked me to explain this to you. He doesn't want anyone but you to come near him. He wants you to keep everybody else away. And you've got to be cheerful."

Annette was crying.

"I know it's awful rough luck on you," said the young man, in his roughly compassionate tones, "his coming home like this."

"It's not that," she murmured. "Wait — forgive me. I don't know what I'm saying. I —"

"I expect you want a minute or two to pull yourself together, and no wonder," he said, awkwardly, but with unmistakable sympathy.

He walked to the window and stood looking out with his hands in his pockets, and his face considerably averted.

The little wind had died away.

"By Jove, what a perfect night," said the medical

student, looking out at the starlit sky above the motionless tree-tops.

She crossed the room and stood beside him.

"I am calm now. It was — the shock," she said. "I should like to ask you a few questions, and then I will go to him without any more delay. About yourself — of course you are staying here?"

"Thank you. Don't bother about me. Mr. Kemys told the man to get a room ready. I'll look after myself. There's nothing to keep you from him."

"Have you any instructions for me?"

"Not now. You'll see the doctor to-morrow, you know. He's sure to suggest something. I mustn't interfere. And your husband has got the remedies — but of course you'd call me up if he were ill again to-night. I hope that's not likely," he said hastily. "There's nothing to do but keep him quiet as I've already said, and I can't say it too emphatically. Keep him quiet and avoid contradicting him. If anything's happened during his absence that would be likely to annoy him —"

A faint sound escaped her lips — almost like the ghost of an hysterical laugh, but she mastered it instantly.

"I am not to tell him?"

"No — just keep it to yourself. Invent any excuses you choose. Don't let him hear anything that could vex him — until he's better."

She looked at him. The question trembled on her

pale lips. Will he ever be better? She did not utter it, but he answered the look.

"It's impossible to tell."

His eyes were compassionate.

"Has he changed?"

"I don't think so — not particularly. He may be stouter."

In the doorway she turned.

"My husband has been — of late years more especially — easily irritated. Was it — had the state of his health anything to do with it?" She looked at him once more; this time with parted lips that trembled slightly, and an expression that unconsciously besought an affirmative answer.

"Yes, yes, *yes*," he said almost violently. "Of course it had. Everything in the world to do with it."

The glance with which she thanked him, with its pathetic lightening of relief and wonder and gladness, was again more eloquent than words.

She hurried out of the room, and he turned away with a lump in his throat and tears in his twinkling grey eyes.

"Whether that's true or not — but it's my belief he was just born with a devil of a temper — she may as well have the comfort of thinking so," said the medical student.

CHAPTER XXI

THE NIGHT IN THE GARDEN

THE change in the appearance of Richard Kemys might escape the eyes of a stranger, but it did not escape the eyes of his wife. The candles on the dressing-table were lighted, and the night moths, attracted through the open window, were hovering about the flames. The dim illumination enabled her to perceive that he was a little thinner in face,— a little stouter in figure, and that the thick hair on his temples had turned white.

He was lying back in the armchair by the window when she opened the door, and he did not move as she crossed the room and came and knelt beside him, and put her slight arm about his broad shoulders, and laid her soft face against his rough chin.

"Dear Richard — you have come home to me, thank God."

"You've seen Bewan," he said gruffly.

"Yes, he told me all you wished. It shall all be done. I will take care of you, and you'll get well here, in the quiet."

He did not answer, but as she pressed his arm very gently, she felt an answering pressure. So little had she expected response that her heart leapt.

Richard remained motionless within those encircling arms, leaning his head against her as though he were deriving some consolation, after all, from the consciousness of her presence — of her enveloping tenderness and devotion, that would be enlisted in his service against every ill that could befall him in this world.

Annette fought with the emotion that threatened to subdue her, and conquered it.

As she knelt beside her husband, with her thin face set, and her light blue eyes fixed,— no one could have guessed the passion of awakened love and longing and sorrow that throbbed in her heart.

It seemed to her that this revelation of Richard's illness had restored him to her as the man she had once believed him to be.

Recollections of his past ebullitions of temper, his unreason, his causeless anger, his petty meanness and despotism, long endured and regretted with shame and tears — all — all — fell away from the image they had disfigured like so many ugly wrappings, to be for ever discarded.

They were not Richard's attributes, but the symptoms of the dread hidden disease from which he had suffered in secret.

The man who now leant against her bosom hiding his feelings with sullen indomitable courage — this was the Richard she had adored. She longed to cry out to him all her pity and tenderness and admiration as she longed to confess to him her own unworthiness.

She had thought so many times of the way in which he would come back. Of his asking for the children who were absent, of the explanations she would have to give, of the brunt of his anger which she would have to bear. Waking and sleeping she had dreamt of his return. She had seen him always as Richard the avenger, towering over her, with loud voice and angry eyes, demanding an account of her stewardship. But of this broken man lying back exhausted in his chair, with the sad helpless look of pain in his blue eyes, the deep furrow between his brows, and his thick hair whitened at the temples — she had never thought.

How had Richard changed thus? Was it indeed the master-tyrant Pain that had subdued and bewildered him, and brought him to this quiet that was so unlike the Richard she had known? Or was it, — oh was it that he was, already, a dying man? Richard! Impossible. She had looked upon him as omnipotent so long that her brain refused to grasp the fact that he was mortal.

She recalled the medical student's compassionate look, and a cold doubt crept about her heart. She thought of the long years of her married life, so monotonous in the living of them that she had sometimes asked herself wearily whether there would never be any change; and lo, now that she had been warned that a change might be at hand she could not believe it. How could it come to an end — that familiar life of everyday in the familiar house — the life of

husband and wife — of father and mother surrounded by their children. Yet what could be more certain than that the end must come, and that the common lot must also be her portion and Richard's? She adored her children. She had sacrificed her peace of mind to her desire for their welfare; but just now she realised them only as the merciless younger generation, which rises triumphant as the phoenix, from the ashes of its parents' loves and lives. Her strong, mighty Richard would lie down meekly to sleep with his father, and Roddy the young, the bold, the joyous — with splendid self-confidence would reign in his stead. Suddenly she saw, as she had seen in her dream, the grave smile of the old Colonel, beckoning her to the Red House, and realised with a strange pang that she might presently be going back to end her days alone beneath that lowly roof which had sheltered her happy childhood. Had not her father ended his days there alone, who had lived and loved and suffered as she in her turn now lived and loved and suffered? She thought of his gallant youth, which had been a youth of strenuous days, even as his manhood had been one of hard work and small profit. She thought of his patience and cheerfulness in old age, his pleasure in little things, his poverty; the honourable poverty, honourably borne, of the soldier who has no opportunity and should have no occasion to seek wealth. Of his silent daily visits to her mother's grave. The old calm words floated through her mind. *The*

thing that hath been it is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun. . . .

But her heart cried out in dumb agony, Not Richard — oh not Richard —

Yet, if he were really in danger of death, then — oh then all the more before he passed through that door of night into the mystery whence there is no recall,— where no pitiful cry of hers could reach him — let her confess her disloyalty, and obtain his forgiveness. In this gentle mood that was upon him now she thought he would forgive her. How could she — how could she risk his going away into the eternal silence unknowing that the wife he trusted had betrayed him,— leaving her to bear that heavy burden of remorse which a few words spoken now might ease for evermore?

Yet she did not speak; but set her lips tightly.

His eyes were closed. His face was peaceful.

Oh Richard, oh my husband, if the world is sinking away beneath your feet,—if indeed you are passing from me — better that I should suffer all my life than add one pang to that passing —

These and other wild thoughts coursed through her brain as she knelt beside her husband — motionless, giving no sign, until presently she rose silently to bring him the things he asked for; and to help him prepare for the rest he desired.

Richard for his part asked no questions, and

wished to be asked none. He was vaguely glad that his wife understood his feelings without explanation as he was vaguely glad to be with her again.

The gentleness of Annette's ministrations had never been more welcome.

He had been so long accustomed to her anxious consideration of all his little ways and fancies, that he had been forced, during his absence, to realise that he found life almost blank without her. He had found himself wishing for her many times during his illness on the return voyage.

Though young Bewan meant kindly, he was but a rough nurse, and had no idea of humouring a surly and unreasonable patient as a woman might have humoured him under the circumstances.

The indifference with which his fellow passengers had regarded Richard Kemys had also come upon him almost as a shock. He had been accustomed for so many years to be king of his little company; to be treated with deference; to have his wishes immediately attended to, and his opinions received with respect.

Richard lay awake in his comfortable bed, among the fresh-scented, country-washed, sun-dried sheets, and realised with relief that he was at home again, and that his wife was at hand to nurse him. He was amazed at the depth of the sense of well-being that he experienced. He thought of Annette more kindly than he had thought of her for years. The contemplation of her devotion soothed him. He did

not think of his children. He had asked Annette if they were all well, and she had answered, Yes, they were all well. He had not mentioned Annie's marriage, lest something should transpire to vex him, or disturb the philosophic calm with which he had grown to regard it. Nor had he spoken of Roddy, whom he knew to be in the Argentine. He regarded this fact also with philosophic calm. It was as well he should be away, the young rascal. Roddy irritated his father, often innocently and, unaware, though sometimes his rebellion was purposeful. But it was not Roddy's fault that he had inherited the old Colonel's face, and his trick of firing up in defence of other people. Richard could not help remembering in the first glow of his content with his return to his wife's care — that it was in defence of his mother that Roddy had always fired up.

The young fool, to suppose a woman needed any defence from her husband. As though a man's wife were not more to him than all her children put together. Which of them all could be trusted to obey him, to carry out his wishes, to attend to his lightest fancies, as she would? It was upon her that he depended, as she depended upon him, and not on Roddy. But he remembered that he had disregarded Annette's passionate appeal on behalf of her son, and the recollection was an uncomfortable one now. He had destroyed her letter instead of keeping it to read when he was far away as she had entreated; but nevertheless he had thought of it many

times when he was far away, and her words had haunted his memory.

"You asked me to forgive you the night Roddy was born . . . how happy I was to forgive you — everything . . . for the sake of those days listen to me now . . . I can no longer speak to you without angering you . . . Do justice to your son as your father did to you, that your children may honour your memory as his memory is honoured, and I will thank you and bless you for ever and ever."

He could see the sentences now as plainly as though they were written in light on the darkness. She was more to him than all her children put together, of course. But he had not listened to her appeal. His mind worked uneasily, but he swore to himself that he would not reinstate Roddy, who had gone to the Argentine in defiance of his wishes . . .

He determined to dismiss the subject from his mind. It was wonderful, he reflected with some complacency, what an adept he had become in dismissing from his mind all the subjects that might distress or annoy him.

Until he was stronger he would continue to exercise that newly acquired power. His wife could look after everything; do everything exactly as she knew he would wish,—relieve him of all responsibility.

A new idea darted into his mind, and became a definite purpose. What a fool he had been not to think of it before!

He would get rid of this vague scruple which had been troubling his conscience ever since he made that infernal will disinheriting his eldest son. He would make a new will in the morning and leave everything to his wife. He would shift the responsibility for which he no longer felt fitted onto her shoulders. After all, if he had any wishes left in the matter he had only to express them and he knew she would carry them out to the letter. What did it matter to him who would have Nantgwilt in the end? Nothing mattered to him but getting well; he would devote himself to the care of his health. There would be far more chance for him now she was there to look after him. He would leave everything to her. He would not be bothered with scruples any more, nor with business, nor with cares of any kind.

He would sit in his garden and rest.

He had thought of his garden very often when there was nothing to be seen from the ship but blue sky and blue sea, for ever receding as the ship for ever advanced. How tired he had grown of it all. He was too old for travelling, though he was but in the prime of life — he had lived in the country too many years.

The glare from the white boards hurt his eyes as he lay back in his deck-chair. He had thought of his garden so often then. Of the refreshing green of the dewy velvet lawn, and the moss under the old spreading cedar with its twisted trunk, and the little brown bench that always seemed to be waiting

humbly beneath it with outstretched arms; and the bright ribbon borders . . . he felt the swaying motion of the steamer again as he dreamt of his garden now . . .

He slept but a little while, and woke complaining of oppression and of the heat of the room, though the windows were wide open and uncurtained.

His wife rose, and set the door open, and presently fanned him until he slept again. But the morning seemed long in coming and the dawn of a breathless summer day found him tired and unrefreshed.

He looked so ill that his wife was terrified, but of her terror she showed no sign.

She was thankful that, though he insisted upon rising, he did not offer to come downstairs, remaining instead by the open window of their bedroom, looking out from his armchair upon the wonderful sunshine which had now pierced the early mists of morning and lay like a benediction upon the garden of which he had dreamed.

A little figure in white emerged from the deep shadows of the ilex grove. Corney — followed by his dog, walking gravely and quietly across the lawn, not running and jumping as was his wont.

He had been to his grandmother's cottage to carry a message from his mother. In the sunshine his uncovered flaxen head shone like gold, and his white cricketing flannels were dazzling as snow against the green. Richard Kemys found a lump rising in his

throat and tears in his eyes. This was the first he had seen of his children since his return. Corney was a fine, handsome little fellow — just such another as Roddy had been at his age. He was almost angry with himself for the emotion which he felt, and which he recollected that he must not indulge, just as he was leaning forward to give a call to the little boy, and bid him come up.

Corney was a fine little chap, and the most like him of all his children, but he was like Roddy too. Why should he suppose the boy would grow up different from the others; who all went their own way as they left childhood, and paid no attention to his wishes?

He remembered the idea he had evolved in the night and resolved to put it into execution.

He rose languidly and fetched his leather writing-case from the dressing-room, and settled himself in his armchair to write. It was odd that so slight an exertion should make him so breathless. Perhaps, after all, he ought to have listened to Bewan and not climbed the hill from the station last night —

Robert Bewan came in presently to bid him good-bye, and found him writing.

“Why should you go? I asked you to stop,” said Richard, none too graciously.

“I only meant to stop until I’d seen you safely down here,” said the young man, in his usual blunt way. “As a matter of fact, I want to get back.”

“Of course you’ll do as you like,” growled Richard. Then it occurred to him that he had, after all,

no further use for young Bewan, since he was safely established at home. He reflected besides that as he had never found his company particularly congenial, there was no reason why he should press him to stay on. He therefore did not renew his invitation, but, bethinking himself, gave utterance to a few difficult words of thanks; not very graciously expressed, but nevertheless genuine in their way, as Robert Bewan felt them to be, though he cut them short.

"We needn't make speeches," he remarked frankly. "I've every reason to be obliged to you. If the voyage hasn't done you all the good we hoped, it's pulled me together and made me feel as fit as I ever felt in my life. I shall tackle my work again with fresh vigour, thanks to you. And if I don't pretend to be particularly cut up at parting, it's not because I'm ungrateful for the substantial benefit you've conferred on me, but because we haven't hit it off as well as I could have wished. I'm a free and easy fellow who often gives offence without meaning to. But on the other hand, hard words break no bones and I'm not a fellow to resent anything a man says when he's ill, you know; and I hope I've done the best I could for you, whether we've liked each other or not."

Richard Kemys uttered a short laugh.

"Oh, yes, you did the best you could," he said, grimly. "I've no doubt I should have gone out on the voyage home if it hadn't been for you. Whether

I shall live to bless you for it remains to be seen. All the same I don't feel up to much this morning. D'ye thing I'm worse? "

"I don't suppose you're any the better for your foolhardiness in walking up from the station last night," said the student, bluntly. "What possessed you, I can't think."

Richard did not answer.

"I suppose I'd better see old Harries," he said presently.

"Of course you had," said young Bewan, but if his words were rough, his tone was kind. "Is there anything I can do for you before I take my departure? "

"You can call old Pryse upstairs, and witness my signature here with him," said Richard, and he smoothed out a clearly written paper upon the blotter before him, with hands that trembled a little.

Later in the day Dr. Harries arrived. He remained but a short time, for it was evident that his presence rather irritated than soothed his patient, and beyond suggesting a preferable drug to one of those ordered by the ship's surgeon, and commending all the rest, he had very little to say. But he told Mrs. Kemys as he went downstairs that he felt it his duty to warn her that her husband was in an alarming condition of health. She did not need the warning, but she listened to all he had to say, declined his offer to send a nurse, and asked him to convey his

report to old Mrs. Kemys, who was anxiously awaiting news at the cottage. He took his leave, promising an early visit on the morrow.

The news of the Squire's return had by this time spread through the village, and speculation ran high as to how he had received the intelligence of his daughter's elopement, which was now the favourite topic of conversation in the neighbourhood. The report that he had fallen down in a fit obtained credit when the doctor's trap was seen at the door of the Manor House, and in the course of the afternoon several of his tenants, and one or two neighbours — from motives of sympathy or out of curiosity — called to enquire; but no one was permitted to enter; and old Pryse had nothing to say except that he had seen his master, who looked much as usual.

As the day wore on Richard observed that the house was strangely quiet, and found pleasure in the reflection that his instructions had been so implicitly obeyed, and that here at least no one was considered but himself. The children made no sound lest he should be disturbed.

His wife dreaded lest he should ask for those who were absent, and for whose absence she would be obliged to account; but there was no need for her to invent the excuses young Bewan had recommended. Richard asked no questions, and showed no interest in anything outside the room in which he lay. He

thought only of the comfort of being quiet, and of his fears lest the pain should return.

He dozed during the greater part of the afternoon refusing the tea his wife brought, and desiring, he said, to make up for his restless night by sleeping as much as possible.

When the heat of the sun declined, and the long shadows fell across the lawn, he woke refreshed, and rose, and asked for some soup, which he took beside the open window; watching the swifts that darted to and fro in the still warm air, crying shrilly as they pursued their invisible prey.

He looked ever more and more longingly into the garden, until at last he decided to descend.

"I've a good mind to spend the night out there," he said to his wife. "I've got accustomed to sleep in the open air on board ship. I slept on deck whenever this infernal breathlessness troubled me, and it troubles me directly I lie down."

She looked at him and saw that opposition would be useless.

"Why not, dear Richard? After all the heat is really almost tropical. I have been sitting out later and later every night."

"I don't want a fuss, and people bringing out rugs and pillows and things as if I were an invalid," he growled. "You can tell Pryse to carry my deck-chair onto the lawn, and to leave it there, and to keep everyone away; and we'll wait till the house is

shut up and they've all gone to bed, and then slip out quietly."

She was relieved that he seemed to take it for granted that she would remain out with him.

The stillness and peace of the coming night already enfolded the garden. The summer darkness stole over the blue hills deepening to purple. The feast of colour spread in the flower borders slowly faded. Stiff perfumed bouquets of red roses on standards now became indistinguishable from their foliage; while the heavy white heads of the drooping niphetos were transformed into delicate phantom globes.

Over an archway a bower of blush roses gleamed faintly through the dusk. The snowy phlox, the ghosts of lilies and white foxgloves, were still discernible.

The dusk deepened, and the colours vanished altogether. Even the white flowers folded the black veil of night about them and became invisible.

The cool and restful space was peopled only with the forms of the trees and bushes. Dark masses of foliage waved and whispered in the night breeze, but the impenetrable sheltering layers of the cedar scarcely stirred . . . If he had been sleeping Richard woke.

"Annette! Are you there?"

"Yes, Richard." She sought his hand and found it in the darkness.

"I was dreaming. I forgot where I was. I thought I was on board ship. It was a happy thought to come out here. I'm much more comfortable than I was last night.— Look here, Annette. I made a new will this morning. If anything happened to me — I suppose that fellow made it clear to you that there's always more or less uncertainty in these cases —?"

She laid her lips upon his hand in silence.

"If anything happened — take it to old Turley, and get him to act for you. Have nothing to do with Machon. Go back to Turley. Do you understand?"

"I understand," she said, and her voice trembled.

"Turley can communicate with Joavan and Bond. They're all sound men," he said gruffly. "I've left everything to you. I want Corney to have the business. You'll remember that. He's a third son, same as I was. It's my wish he should be richer than the others, and he will be, if he chooses to work — old Bond will teach him. About all the rest — I don't care. I've left the responsibility to you. You can do what you're pleased to call justice — to Roddy — to all of them."

"Oh Richard!"

He felt her tears upon his hand, and knew her gratitude, and did not mistake the cause. Perhaps he even divined something of her thought.

That justice should be done to her boy was much; but that he should do it was everything.

Roddy was very dear to her; but what was he, what was anyone, compared with this her mate; the lover of her girlhood, the husband of her youth, the father of her children?

Her heart throbbed, her tears fell fast, her past fears mocked her, and her remorse rushed upon her with a force almost unbearable.

The lost illusion of Richard's perfection stole back upon her, forming itself as a vision upon the darkness of many years' sorrow and suffering and disappointment.

After all, the man to whose image she had always clung in her heart of hearts was the real Richard, though all the world had condemned the man he had seemed to be.

"That's all right," said Richard's voice, drowsily. "I was dreaming I had something to tell you, and that I was off on another voyage and couldn't get at you. Now I've nothing on my mind I shall have a longer sleep."

He slept, and she waked and watched.

In all her life she had never passed a night out of doors, and she felt no inclination to slumber. She drew her wraps about her, and waited for the dawn, listening with a tenderness inexpressible to his gentle breathing.

At four o'clock the sky was already a clear pale blue, and little cirrus clouds stretched lazily in the depths of space. On the waking earth birds twit-

tered, cocks crowed, and horses neighed; but mankind was silent.

Richard's chair was turned away from the house towards the distant hills beyond his own fields and woods, which sloped down to the valley and river, and were now shrouded in a thick white mist; against which one or two of the nearest forest trees showed motionless.

He lay so still that a vague uneasiness disturbed her. She rose, and came softly to his side, and bent over his sleeping face. The colour fled from her own, leaving it not less white. She sank upon her knees and lifted the cold hand.

There was no doubt. She knew instantly; and from the perfect calm of his expression understood that he must have passed unknowing — from sleep to death.

The glory of the coming sunrise slowly brightened the east, and the solid white mist caught a rosy hue, and became transparent and golden.

The muffled forms of distant tress emerged as from a shroud, and took shape and colour.

The crowning roses of the garden archways were lit as though by fire. The trunks of the firs shone red, and the slender stems of the weeping birch glittered silver in the glorious beams as the sun rose majestically over the hills.

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